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THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA

(*MARTA Y MARÍA*):

A Realistic Social Novel

BY

DON ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

NEW YORK:
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.,

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THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA.

AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE.

THE work which I now have the honor of presenting to the public is not based upon ordinary every-day occurrences; nor are the incidents narrated in it such as we are wont frequently to witness. Very likely it will be called untrue or improbable, and regarded as a fanciful production, remote from all reality. With resignation I bow myself in advance to these criticisms, though I claim the right to protest in my own heart, if not publicly, against the unfairness of such a charge. For the chief events of this novel — I must say it, though my glory as an originator may be destroyed — have all actually taken place. The author has done nothing more than recount them and give them unity.

I have the presumption to believe that, though *Marta y María* may not be a beautiful novel, it is a realistic novel. I know that realism — at the present time called naturalism — has many impulsive adepts, who conceive that truth exists only in the vulgar incidents of life, and that these are the only ones worth transferring to art. Fortunately this is not the case. Outside of markets, garrets, and slums, the truth exists no less. The very apostle of naturalism, Emil Zola, confesses this by painting scenes of polished and lofty poetry, which assuredly conflict with his exaggerated æsthetic theories.

The character of the protagonist of my novel is an exceptional character. I take delight in acknowledging this. But to be exceptional is not to be less true to nature, less human. Mystic temperaments are not apt to abound in Madrid: the frivolous and sensual life of the court is little adapted for their development. But all who have lived in a province will have known, just as I have, certain passionate and pious souls, who, without any motive of a temporal kind, have renounced the world and consecrated themselves to God. Take the periodicals, and scarcely a day will pass without your seeing the announcement of some young woman becoming a nun. Among these young persons are beautiful girls, daughters of wealthy families, rejoicing in all the gifts of nature and the flatteries of society. Is not, peradventure, the careful study of such souls worthy of the literary man, even though he call himself a naturalist?

The motive or occasion of this book being written is as follows: I found myself one afternoon in Don Fernando Fe's bookstore, turning over recent publications and periodicals, when there fell into my hands a number of the *Ilustración Española y Americana*, in which appeared a capital cut representing "The Taking of the Veil in a Convent of Carmelite Nuns." A pretty young girl was seen on her knees before the inner door of the convent, from which three sisters, bundled up in great thick robes of black, were coming forth to receive her, with a coarse wooden cross. In the background an aged bishop was calling down upon her the blessing of heaven; and a lady, in whom the mother was to be instantly recognized, was looking on with ecstatic and troubled eyes. Still farther back there was a numerous group of people, pre-eminent among them being two other young ladies, elegantly

dressed, whose resemblance to the novice quickly told that they were her sisters. The first was sadly contemplating the ceremony, while the other hid her face in her hands, as if she were trying to smother her sobs.

I felt impressed in presence of this scene so admirably interpreted by the artist, and as a natural consequence I was assailed by many memories and not a few reflections connected with the same subject, and I came to the conclusion that it was worth while to make a study of it. It did not deal with anything ancient and remote which might serve merely as a theme for the investigations of the historian, but with a most curious and interesting fact taking place before our very eyes. The enthusiasm, the ardent raptures, the ecstasies, and even the frenzies of these souls at once simple and passionate, who find no way to quench the thirst devouring them, to calm the unrest torturing them, by intercourse with the world, and who seek in the mystery of the cloister, medicine for their ills, seemed to me a theme worthy for the contemporary novelist to master and offer with due respect to the consideration of the public. A certain series of events which took place a few years ago, and happened to come under my observation, occurred to my mind, and instantly the desire seized me to write a novel. But one circumstance proved to be a stumbling-block. It had never entered into my calculations to write novels with transcendental themes, especially those based upon religious subjects. This I declared without qualification in a little line of parenthesis which I put under the title of my first novel, *El Señorito Octavio* (a novel without transcendental thought). And in truth I was afraid to bring myself so soon into conflict with my æsthetic programme in a country where everything is pardoned except contradiction. But among the honor-

able pleasures conferred by the Supreme Creator upon the heroic Spanish public, there is none more keen and delectable than that of breaking the laws and programmes which they have freely imposed upon themselves. In this particular, sybaritism has reached the point of making itself every morning some rule for the pleasure afforded by breaking it in the afternoon. Therefore as soon as I saw the contradiction, the problem was solved. I will write the novel, I said, for my conscience, so that I may have to endure fifteen literary sessions of the Athenæum without stirring from my place.

The novel is now written. The subject is one sufficiently rude and liable to be carried away by prejudices and extravagances which the novelist who has a wish to paint the reality must avoid with care. I have striven with all my power to bring myself into a point of view relatively neutral (granting that the absolute cannot be attained), and to study the theme with the calmness of the physiologist. Whatever my sympathies may have been, I have tried always to subordinate them to the truth and to the profound respect which all noble sentiments and all honest beliefs deserve from me. You shall say if I have succeeded.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE STREET.

WITHIN the arcade the people were crowding relentlessly ; each and every one was performing prodigies of skill to flout the physical law of the impenetrability of bodies, by reducing his own to an imaginary quantity. The night was unusually thick and dark. The feet of the loungers found each other out in the darkness, and when they met they indulged in somewhat expressive forms of endearment ; the elbows of some, by a secret and fatal impulse, went straight into the eyes of others ; the passive subject of such caresses instantly raised his hand to the place of contact, and usually exclaimed with some asperity, " You barbarian, you might at least — " but an energetic " Sh — sh — sh " from the throng obliged him to nip his discourse in the bud, and silence again began to reign. Silence was at this time the most pressing necessity which was felt by the inhabitants of Nieva there gathered together. The least noise was regarded as an act of sedition, and was instantly punished by a threatening hiss. Coughs and sneezes were prohibited, and still more condign punishment was meted out to laughter and conversation. There was profuse perspiration, although the night was not among the mildest of autumn.

In the arcades of the houses opposite, more or less the same state of things existed ; but in the street itself there were few people, because a very fine rain was slowly falling, and this the natives of Nieva had learned not to

despise, since in the long run and notwithstanding its gentle and insinuating ways, it was like any other. Only a few people with umbrellas, and some others who, not having them, sheltered themselves with their philosophy, maintained a firm footing in the midst of the gutter.

The balconied windows of the house of Elorza were thrown wide open, and through the embrasures streamed a bright and cheerful light which made the dark and misty night outside still more melancholy. Likewise there streamed forth from time to time torrents of musical notes let loose from a piano.

The house of Elorza was the principal one in a long, narrow street, adorned with an arcade on both sides like almost all the rest in the town of Nieva. Its most important façade looked into this street, but it had another with balconies facing the town square, which was wide and handsome like that of a city. Though the darkness does not allow us to make out exactly the appearance of the house, yet we can prove that it is a building of faced stone and of one story, with spacious arcade, the elegant and stately arches of which instantly declare the rank of its owners. This arcade, which might be called a portico, makes a notable contrast with that of the succeeding houses, which is low and narrow and supported by round, rough pillars without any ornamentation. Likewise the same difference is to be seen in the pavement. In the arcade of which we are speaking, it is of well-set flagging, while the others offer merely an inconvenient footway paved with cobble-stones. Without venturing, indeed, to call it a palace, it is not presumptuous to assert that this mansion had been built for the exclusive use and gratification of some person of importance; the fact that it had only one story very clearly decided this point. The truth

demands that we set forth likewise the fact that the architect had given undeniable proofs of good taste in laying out the plan of the building, since its proportions could not be more elegant and correct. But what most struck the eye was a certain attractive and aristocratic thriftiness about it perfectly free from presumption, which, though calculated to inspire envy, certainly did not arouse in the minds of the people those hatreds and heart-burnings always excited by overweening wealth. The frowning firmament ceaselessly poured down all the moist and chilly mist with which its clouds were surcharged. The shadows shrowded and concealed the outlines of the house, crowding together underneath the arches and in the hollows of their stone mouldings, but they did not dare so much as to approach the bright, joyful openings of the balconies, which drove them away in terror. They gazed clandestinely into the heavenly *el dorado* of the interior, and eaten up with envy, they poured out their spite upon the heads of the philosophers who were listening in the open air. The pyramidal group of loungers, enjoying the protection of the opposite arcades, did not take their eyes from the balconies, while those who clustered under the arches of the house itself, as they lacked this expedient, entirely trusted to their ears, the receptive capacity of which they strove to increase by placing the palms of their hands behind them and doubling them forward a little. The darkness was dense in both arcades, for the town lanterns shed their pallid rays at respectable distances. Each served only to light up a sufficiently circumscribed area at wide intervals in the plaza, making melancholy reflections on the wet stones of the pavement. Amid the shadows now and then the light of a cigar flashed out for an instant, causing a ruddy

glow on the smoker's mustachios. A little further away, on the corner, a variety shop still remained open ; but the shopkeeper's shadow could be seen often crossing in front of the door as he was putting his wares in order before shutting up. On the principal floor of the same house the balconied windows were all thrown wide open ; through them rang voices, coarse outbursts of laughter, and the clicking of billiard balls, sounds which fortunately reached the arcades greatly softened. This was the *Café de la Estrella*, frequented until the small hours of the night by a dozen indefatigable patrons. Otherwise, silence reigned, although it was impossible to get rid of the peculiar rumble inseparable from the thronging of people in one place, which is caused by the shuffling of feet, the stirring of bodies, and above all by the smothered phrases in falsetto tones let fall by some in the hearing of others.

At the moment when the present history begins, the vibrating tones of the piano were heard prelude the passionate *allegro* of the aria from "*La Traviata*": *gran Dio morir si giovine*. When the prelude was ended, a soft and appropriate accompaniment began. The expectation was intense. At last, above the accompaniment arose a clear and most dulcet voice, echoing through the whole plaza like a sound from heaven. The two groups of listeners were stirred as though they had touched their fingers to the knob of an electric machine, and a subdued murmur of satisfaction ran up and down among them.

"'Tis Maria," said three or four, hoping that the ears of the walls would not overhear them.

"It was high time!" remarked one, in a little louder voice.

"It is she that is singing now ; hark ! and not that

beast of the canning factory!" exclaimed a third, still more impulsive.

"Have the goodness to keep quiet, gentlemen, so that we can hear!" cried a very angry voice.

"Let that man hold his tongue!"

"Out with him!"

"Silence!"

"Sh — sh — sh — shhh!"

"I have always insisted that there are no people more ill-bred than those of this place!" again cried the angry voice.

"Hold your tongue!"

"Don't be a fool, man!"

"Sh — sh — sh — shhh!"

Finally all became silent, and Verdi's passionate melody could be heard, interpreted with remarkable delicacy. The lovely, limpid voice, issuing from the open balconies, rent the saturated atmosphere out of doors, and vibrating with force, went the rounds of the plaza, and died away in the mazes of the town. The loneliness and gloom of the night increased the power and range of that lovely voice, lovely beyond all praise. I do not say that, for any one of those clever people who feel themselves wrapped up in the vocalism of the paradise of the Royal Theatre, the singer was a prodigy in her mastery of attacking, sustaining, and trilling the notes; but I affirm that for those whom we do not see tortured by musical scruples, she sang very well, and she possessed, above all, a bewitching voice, of a passionate *timbre*, which penetrated to the very depths of the soul.

The loungers of both arcades, and likewise the philosophers of the gutter, gave unmistakable proofs of feeling moved. The taste for music in country towns always

partakes of a more violent and impetuous nature than is shown in large cities, and this is due to the fact that the latter are furnished with an excess of theatres and salons, while the former can only from time to time enjoy it. No one whispered, or moved a step from his place; with open mouths and far-away eyes, they followed ecstatically the course of that despairing melody, in which Violetta mourns that she must die after such sufferings undergone. The most sensitive began to shed tears, remembering some gallant adventure of their youthful days. The sky, still relentless, kept sending down its inexhaustive deposit of liquid dust. Two of the philosophers of the gutter felt of their garments, shook their sombreros, and muttering a curse against the elements, took refuge in the arcade, causing by their arrival a slight disturbance among their neighbors.

At some little distance from both groups, and near a column, were seen, not very distinctly, three small bodies, with whom we must bring the reader into contact for a few moments. One of them struck a match to light a cigar, and there appeared three fresh, laughing, mischievous faces of fourteen or fifteen years, which resolved into darkness again as the match went out.

"Say, Manolo," asked one, lowering his voice as much as possible, "who gave you that mouth-piece?"

"Suppose I ragged it of my brother!"

"Is it amber?"

"Amber and meerschaum; it cost three *duros* in Madrid."

"I pity you, if you should get caught by your —"

"Hush up, you fool you! What have we got a servant in the house for, if not to blame for such faults?"

A man who was standing nearer than the rest, harshly

bade them hold their tongues. The urchins obeyed. But after a moment Manolo said, in a barely perceptible voice, "See here, lads! would you like to have me break this all up in a jiffy?"

"Yes, yes, Manolo!" hastily replied the others, who evidently had great faith in the destructive powers of their companion.

"Then you just wait; stay quiet where you are."

And moving a little aside from them, he hid himself beside a door, and set up three extraordinary yelps, precisely like those emitted by dogs when they are beaten. A tremendous, furious, universal barking immediately resounded through the spaces. All the dogs of the community, united and compact, like one single mastiff, protested energetically against the punishment inflicted upon one of their kind. Maria's singing was completely lost beneath that formidable yelping. The listening multitude experienced a painful shock, stirred tumultuously for some moments, uttered incoherent exclamations against the cursed animals, endeavored to bring them to silence by shouting at them, and at last, seeing the uselessness of their efforts, resigned themselves to the hope that they would cease of themselves. The howls, in fact, were gradually dying away, all the time becoming more and more infrequent and remote; only the dog belonging to the variety shop, which had just been closed, continued for some time barking furiously. At length even he ceased, though most unwillingly. The song of the dying Violetta was once again heard, pure and limpid as before, and once again the auditors began to experience the softening impressions which it had made upon them, although they were somewhat restless and nervous, as if fearing at any moment to be deprived of that pleasure.

Manolo, choking with amusement, rejoined his companions and was received with stifled laughter and applause.

"Come, Manolito, yelp once again."

"Wait, wait awhile; we want to take 'em by surprise."

After some little time had passed, Manolo once more cautiously crept away, and, skirting the group, stationed himself at the opposite extreme. From there he set up three more howls like the first, and the same thunderous barking filled the spaces, giving back kind for kind. The multitude underwent a new excess of vexation, but accompanied by far greater tumult; everybody was speaking at once, and uttering furious ejaculations.

"This is horrible!"

"Here's a concert for us given by those confounded dogs!"

"The dog that howled is the one to blame."

"Curse him!"

"Confound it!"

"Silence! silence! give us a chance to hear something!"

"What can you hear?"

"Deuced bad luck!"

"Silence! silence!"

"Sh—sh—sh—shhhhhh!"

The dogs one after another were beginning to quiet down, according to their own good pleasure, and little by little calm was reasserting its sway. Violetta's song reappeared, full of melancholy, sweetness, and passion. Maria's voice, in her interpretation of it, expressed such pathos that the heart was melted, and tears sprang into the eyes. One single dog, the one at the variety shop, kept on barking with a persistency that was in the highest degree exasperating, since it prevented the

singer's voice from reaching the ears of the public with the clearness desired. A man with a cudgel in his hand detached himself from the throng, and braving the elements, crossed the plaza to stop his barking, but the dog immediately smelt the stick and took to flight. The man came back into the arcade. At length perfect silence reigned in the plaza, and the music lovers could enjoy to their hearts' content the concert in the house of Elorza.

What had become of Manolo? His companions waited for him for some time, so as to congratulate him on his praiseworthy conduct, but he did not put in an appearance. The smaller urchin at length timidly asked the other, —

“Say! what would they do to him if they'd caught him yelping?”

“Why, nothing; they'd treat him to a little cane syrup.”¹

He who had propounded the question trembled a little, and held his peace.

“But then,” continued the other, “they haven't caught him, not a bit of it; he's too cute to let himself get caught.”

At this instant Manolo raised two shrieks still more maddening in the opposite arcade, and with the same madness the dogs of the neighborhood, barking, took up the refrain. It is impossible to describe what happened thereupon in the multitude of listeners in both arcades. The tumult which ensued was in reality overpowering. A goodly number of hands flew about in the darkness, flourishing terrible canes and unbrellas, and from both the throngs arose a chorus of imprecations far from flattering to the canine race. The confusion and disorder took possession of all minds. Breasts breathed nothing but vengeance and extermination.

¹ *Anglice*, oil of birch.

"Kill that beastly cur!" cried a voice above the tumult.

"Yes, yes, break his back for him!" replied another, instigating the fittest method of slaughter.

"That dog, that dog!"

"But where is that cursed beast?"

"Find him and break his back!"

"And if you can't find the dog, break his master's back!"

"That's the idea! his master's!"

"Thunder and lightning! kill 'em both!"

The disorder had increased to such a degree, and shouting had become so scandalous, that some of balconied windows in the vicinity emitted a sharp sound, and were cautiously opened; the inquisitive heads which were thrust forth, not being able to discover what had caused the disturbance, and fearing to catch cold, were incontinently withdrawn. In the house of Elorza three or four people likewise peered out and likewise hurriedly drew back, and oh! the grief of it! closed the windows as they went.

"Well now! we shall hear what we must hear."

"Have they shut the windows?"

"Yes, señor, they have, and shut 'em up tight."

From that multitude escaped a submissive sigh of weariness and rage. There was silence for a moment, a tribute rendered to their vanished hopes. No one moved from his place. At last some one said in a loud voice: "Señores, good night, and good luck to you. I am going home!"

This salutation shook them from their stupor. The groups began to dissolve slowly, not without uttering cholerick exclamations. A few individuals walked under the arcades. Others crossed the plaza with

brellas spread. A few remained in the same place, making endless commentaries on what had just occurred. At last a half-dozen loafers remained, and these, tired of complaining in that locality, adjourned to the Café de la Estrella, to do the same. While they were crossing the space that lay between the arcade and the café, an angry voice, the same which had raised its protest against the faulty manners of that town, said, with still more anger, —

“I have always declared that there aren't any worse trained dogs than those in this city!”

CHAPTER II.

THE SOIRÉE AT THE ELORZA MANSION.

“WHAT a shame, Isidorito, that you did not study for a doctor! I don’t know why it is I imagine you must have a keen eye for diseases.”

The young man turned red with pleasure.

“Doña Gertrudis, you flatter me; I have no other desert than that of sticking fast to whatever I undertake, and this seems to me absolutely necessary in whatever career one devotes himself to.”

“You are quite right. The main thing is to apply one’s self to what lies before him, and not go wool-gathering. Now, for example, take Don Maximo. It cannot be denied that he has great knowledge, and I wish him well, but he has the misfortune of not applying himself to anything that is said to him, and therefore he scarcely ever hits the mark. Please tell me, Isidorito, how is it possible for man to succeed in curing one, if when the invalid is telling him her sufferings, he sets himself to work sharpening lead-pencils or drumming with his fingers. You don’t know how I have suffered on account of him. I pray God may not set down against him the harm he has done me. My husband is very fond of him — and so am I too, you must believe me. In spite of all, he is a good man, and it’s twenty-four years since he first entered this house; but I must tell the truth though it is hard: the poor man has the misfortune of not applying himself — of not applying himself little or much.

"Just so, just so. Don Maximo, in my opinion, lacks those gifts of observation indispensable to the profession to which he belongs. Perhaps it may surprise you to know what qualifications are needed for the practice of medicine from a scientific point of view; it is my own private opinion, which I am ready to sustain anywhere, either in public or in private. Medicine, in my judgment, is nothing else whatever than an empirical profession, purely empirical. I repeat that it is my private opinion, and that I expound it as such, but I harbor the belief that very soon it will be a truth universally accepted."

"The truth is, Isidorito, that he has simply not understood me. Day before yesterday I spent the whole day with a roaring in my head as though a lot of drums were beating behind it. At the same time this left knee was so swollen that I could not even walk from my room to the dining-room. I sent a message to Don Maximo, and he did not appear till it was dark. I assure you I passed a wretched day, and if it had not been for some tallow plasters which my daughter Marta put on my temples at midnight, I should certainly have died, for Don Maximo did not think it necessary even to have a lamp lighted to see me."

"What you point out still more confirms my assertion. You see how domestic remedies, administered without other judgment than that suggested by experience, by the results obtained in a long series of cases, sometimes operate on the organism in a more successful way than scientific medicine. Such a thing could not happen in our profession, señora, where all the chances that may occur are foreseen in advance by the laws, or by jurisprudence raised into the category of the law. There is not a single litigation which does not find its adequate solution in the

civil codes, nor can any crime or misdeed whatsoever be committed, without provision being made for it in some article of the penal code. And in order that nothing may even be wanting the free will of the tribunals (I except the *usual* interpretation), we have as a supplement the canonical law, which is an abundant source of rules for conduct, though these all are based principally on equity."

"Certainly, certainly, Isidorito. Doctors absolutely do not understand a single thing. If I could measure out into bottles, once for all, the medicine that I have taken, I could very easily open an apothecary shop. And yet here you see me just as I was at the very beginning, — at the very beginning, — without having made a single step in advance. God grants me great resignation, otherwise — Just consider! yesterday I was as usual, but to-day, my fête-day too, what I suffer I'm sure will be the death of me, the death of me; — an uneasiness throughout my body, — a crawling up and down my legs like ants, — a rumbling in my ears. You who have so much talent, don't you know what it is to have a rumbling in the ears?"

"Señora, I think — ahem — that a purely nervous state is answerable for this infirmity, — nervous alterations are so varied and extraordinary — ahem — that it is not possible to reduce them to fixed principles, and so it is much better not to lay down any rule, but to study them in detail, or let each one stand separately."

It was hard work, but at last he extricated himself from the difficulty. Isidorito was a lean, bashful young man, with deep precocious wrinkles in his cheeks, with thin hair and goggle eyes. He was regarded as one of the most serious-minded youths, or perhaps the most serious-minded

youth of the town, and always served as a mirror for the fathers of families, to hold up before their rattlebrain sons. "Don't you see how well Isidorito behaves in society, and with what aplomb he talks on all sorts of subjects?" "Ah, if you were like Isidorito, what a happy old age you would make me spend!" "Shame on you for letting Isidorito be made doctor of laws these four years, while you have not succeeded in graduating as a licentiate yet, you blockhead!"

Doña Gertrudis, wife of Don Mariano Elorza, the master of the house in which we find ourselves, is seated, or, to speak more correctly, is reclining, in an easy-chair at Isidorito's side. Although she had not yet passed her forty-fifth year, she appeared to be as old as her husband, who was now approaching his sixtieth. Not entirely lacking in her cadaverous and faded face were the lines of an exceptional beauty, which had given much to talk about there from 1846 to 1848, and which had redounded to her in a multitude of ballads, sonnets, and acrostics, by the most distinguished poets of the town, inserted in a weekly journal entitled *El Judio Errante*, which was published at that time in Nieva. Doña Gertrudis preserved with great care a gorgeously bound collection of *Judios Errantes*, and was in the habit of assuring her friends that if the young man who signed his acrostics with a V and three stars had not faded away with quick consumption, he would have been by this time the fashionable poet; and that if another lad, named Ulpiano Menéndez, who disguised himself under the pseudonym of *The Moor of Venice*, had not gone off to America to make his fortune in business, he would have been, at least, as great as Ayola, Campoamor, or Nuño de Arce. Don Mariano, her husband, shared the same conviction,

although at another epoch the lyric poet, as well as the merchant, had caused him great anxieties, and not a few times had disturbed the peaceful course of his love; but he was a just man and fond of giving every one his due.

Doña Gertrudis was wrapt up in a magnificent plush comforter, and her head was covered with a net, underneath which appeared her hair turning from auburn to white. Her features were delicate and regular, and of a singularly faded pallor. Her eyes were blue and extremely melancholy. The marks of close confinement rather than of illness were to be seen in that face.

"This roaring in my ears is killing me, killing me. I cannot eat, I cannot sleep, I cannot get any rest anywhere."

"I think that you ought to stay in your room."

"That is worse, Isidorito, that is worse. In my room I cannot distract my thoughts. My mind begins to grind like a mill, and it ends by giving me a fever. I am much sicker than people give me credit for. They'll see how this will end. To-day I am so nervous, so nervous.— Feel my pulse, Isidorito, and tell me if I am not feverish."

As she drew out her thin hand and gave it to the young man, Don Mariano and Don Maximo, who were engaged in lively discussion in the recess of a balconied window, turned their faces in her direction and smiled. Doña Gertrudis blushed a little and hastened to hide her hand under her comforter.

"Your wife already has a new physician!" added Don Maximo, in a tone of irony.

"Bah, bah, bah! What cat or dog is there in town that my wife won't have taken into consultation? These days she is furious with you, and says that she is going to die without your paying any attention to her. I find

her better than ever. But we shall see, Don Maximo. Do you really believe that we can accept the line from Miramar?"

"And why not?"

"Don't you comprehend that it would swamp us forever?"

"Don Mariano, it seems to me that you are blinded. What is of importance for Nieva is to have a railroad right away, right away, I say!"

"What is of importance for Nieva is to have a decent road, a decent road, I say. The line from Miramar would be our ruin, for it ties us to Sarrió, which, as you know very well, has far greater importance as a commercial town and a seaport town than we have. In a few years it would swallow us like a cherry-stone. Moreover, you must take into account that as it is fifteen kilometers from the junction to Nieva, and only twelve to Sarrió; trade would not fail to select the latter point for exportation, on account of the saving in the rate, for those three kilometers of difference. On the other hand, the line from Sotolongo offers the great advantage of uniting us to Pinarrubio, which can never enter into rivalry with us; and at the same time it decidedly shortens the distance to the junction, bringing it down to thirteen kilometers. The difference in the rates, therefore, is a mere trifle, not sufficient to induce trade to go to Sarrió. If you add to this the fact that sooner or later —"

A violent coughing fit cut short Don Mariano's discourse. He was a large, tall man, with white beard and hair, the beard very abundant. His black eyes gleamed like those of a boy, and in his ruddy cheeks time had not succeeded in ploughing deep furrows. Doubtless he had been one of the most gallant young men of his day,

and even as we find him now, he still attracted attention by his genial and venerable countenance, and by his noble athletic figure. The violence of his cough had a powerful effect on his sanguine complexion, and he grew exceedingly red in the face. After he had stopped coughing, he resumed the thread of his discourse.

“If you add to the fact that sooner or later we shall have a good port, either in El Moral or in Nieva itself, — for the war isn’t going to last forever, nor is the government going to leave us always in the condition of pariahs, — you will see at once what an impulse will be instantly given to the trade of the town and how soon we shall put Sarrió into the shade.”

“Well, well, I agree that the line from Sotolongo offers certain advantages; but you very well know that neither at the present time, nor for many days to come, can we do anything but dream about that one, while the road from Miramar is in our very hands. The government is deeply interested in it because there is no other means of protecting our gun-factory. You certainly realize that if the Carlists succeeded in breaking the line of Somosierra, they would overrun us and make themselves at home; they would take the arms on hand, dismantle the factory, and without the slightest risk they could set out for the valley of Cañedo. At present there is no danger of their breaking the line; I grant that, but who can guarantee what the future may bring forth? Moreover, may not the day come when the Carlist element which we have here will raise its head? Then if there were a railroad, no matter from what point, nothing would be more easy than to set down here in a couple of hours four or five thousand men —”

“In the first place, Don Maximo, a military railroad,

as you yourself confess that the one from Miramar is to be, is not such as we have the right to ask of the nation. We need a genuine railroad, suitable for the promotion of our interests, and not to serve merely for the protection of a factory. Just consider that it is a work to last for all time, and that if from its very inception it suffers from a gross mistake, this mistake will hang forever over our town. In the second place, the Carlists will never get beyond Somosierra. As to their raising their heads here, you understand perfectly well that it is impossible because they have very few elements to rely on — and, as to their doing this — ”

“ I have reason to believe that they are ! We must be on the watch, and not be found napping. And, as a final reason, a sparrow in the hand is worth more than a hundred flying. — But tell me, Don Mariano, to change the subject, have the stables been put in order yet ? ”

Don Mariano, instead of replying, felt in all the pockets of his coat with a distracted air, and not finding what he was looking for, turned towards a corner of the room.

“ Martita, come here ! ”

A young girl who was seated at one end of a sofa, not talking to anybody, came running to him. She might have been thirteen or fourteen years old, but the proportions of a woman grown were very distinctly observable in her. Nevertheless, she wore short dresses. She had a light complexion, with black hair and eyes, but her countenance did not offer the exasperating expression so commonly met with in faces of that kind. The features could not have been more regular and their *tout ensemble* could not have been more harmonious ; nevertheless, her beauty lacked animation. It was what is commonly called a cold face.

"Listen, daughter: go to my room, open the second drawer on the left-hand side of my writing-table, and bring me the cigar-case which you'll find there."

The girl went off on the run, and quickly returned with the article.

"Let us go and have a smoke in the dining-room," said Don Mariano, taking Don Maximo by the arm.

And the two left the parlor by one of the side doors.

Marta sat down again in the same place. The ladies on one side were engaged in lively conversation, but she took no share in it. She kept her seat, casting her eyes indifferently from one part of the parlor to the other, now resting them on one group of bystanders, now on another, and more particularly dwelling on the pianist, who at that moment was *executing* an arrangement of *Semiramide*.

Scarcely ever had the parlors of the Elorza mansion presented a more brilliant appearance; all the sofas of flowered damask were occupied by richly dressed ladies with bare arms and bosoms. The chandelier suspended from the middle, reflected the light in beautiful hues which fell upon smooth skins, making them look like milk and roses. Those fair bosoms were infinitely multiplied by the mirrors on both sides: the severe bottle-green paper of the parlor brought out all their whiteness. Marta turned to look at the Señoras de Delgado; three sisters: one, a widow, the other two, old maids. All were upwards of forty; the old maids did not trust to their youthfulness, but they had absolute confidence in the power of their shining shoulders and their fat and unctuous arms. Near them was the Señorita de Morí, round-faced, sprightly, with mischievous eyes, an orphan and rich. At a little distance was the Señora de Ciudad, napping peacefully until the hour should come for her to collect the six

daughters whom she had scattered about in different parts of the parlor. Yonder in a corner her sister Maria was holding a confidential talk with a young man. The girl's eyes wandered slowly from one point to another. The music interested her very slightly. She seemed to be sure of not being noticed by any one, and her face kept the icy expression of indifference of one alone in a room.

The gentlemen in black dress-coats properly buttoned, languidly clustered about the doors of the library and dining-room, staring persistently at the arms and bosoms occupying the sofas. Others stood behind the piano, waiting till a period of silence gave them time to express by subdued exclamations the admiration with which their souls were overflowing. Only a very few, well beloved by fortune, had received the flattering compliment of having some lady calm with her hand the exuberant inclinations of her silken skirts and make a bit of room for them beside her. Puffed up with such a privilege, they gesticulated without ceasing, and spread their talents for the sake of entertaining the magnanimous señora, and the three or four other ladies who took part in the conversation. The torrent of demisemiquavers and double demisemiquavers pouring from the piano which was situated in one corner of the parlor, filled its neighborhood and entirely quenched the buzzing of the conversation. At times, however, when in some passage the pianist's fingers struck the keys softly, the distressing clatter of the opening and shutting of fans was heard, and above the dull, confused murmur of the thoughtless chatterers some word or entire sentence would suddenly become perceptible, making those who were drawn up behind the piano shake their heads in disgust. The heat was intense, although the balconied windows were thrown open.

The atmosphere was stifling and heavy with an indistinct and disagreeable odor, compounded of the perfume of pomades and colognes and the effluvia of perspiring bodies. In this confusion of smells pre-eminent was the sharp scent of rice-powder.

Doña Gertrudis according to her daily habit had gone sound asleep in her easy-chair. She asserted an invalid's right, and no one took it amiss. Isidorito, getting up noiselessly, went and stood by the library door. From that impregnable coigne of vantage he began to shoot long, deep, and passionate glances upon the Señorita de Morí, who received the fires of the battery with heroic calmness. Isidorito had been in love with the Señorita de Morí ever since he knew what dowry and *paraphernalia*¹ meant, rousing the admiration of the whole town by his loyalty. This passion had taken such possession of his soul that never had he been known to exchange a word with or speed an incendiary look towards any other woman except the señorita aforesaid. But Isidorito, contrary to what might have been believed, considering his vast legal attainments and his gravity no less vast, met with a slight contrariety in his love-making. Señorita de Morí was in the habit of lavishing fascinating smiles on everybody, of squandering warm and languishing glances on all the young men of the community; all — except Isidorito. This incomprehensible conduct did not fail to cause him some disquietude, compelling him to meditate often on the shrewdness of the Roman legislators who were always unwilling to grant women legal capacity. He had lately been appointed municipal attorney of the district, and this, by the authority conferred upon him, gave him great

¹ *Paraphernalia bona*, in Spanish *bienes parafernales*, are the goods and chattels brought by a wife independent of her dower.

prestige among his fellow-citizens. But, indeed, the Señorita de Morí, far from allowing herself to be fascinated by her suitor's new position, seemed to regard his appointment as ridiculous, judging by the pains she took from that time forth to avoid all visual communication with him. Still our young friend was not going to be cast down by these clouds, which are so common among lovers, and he continued to lay siege to the restless damsel's chubby face and three thousand duros income, sometimes by means of learned discourses, and sometimes by languishing and romantic actions.

At one side of Marta a certain young engineer who had just arrived from Madrid, turned the listening circle (*tertulia*) gathered around him into an Eden by his wheedling and graceful conversation. It was a *tertulia*, or *petit comité*, as the engineer called it, consisting exclusively of ladies, the nucleus of which was made up by three of the De Ciudad girls.

"That's only one of your gallant speeches, Suárez," said one lady.

"Of course it is," echoed several.

"It is absolute truth, and whoever has lived here any length of time will say so. In Madrid there's no half-way about it; the women are either perfectly beautiful or perfectly hideous. That union of charming and attractive faces which I see here is not to be found there; and so don't let it surprise you when I tell you that the hideous are much more numerous than the beautiful."

"Oh, pshaw! Madrid is where the prettiest women are to be seen, and especially the most elegant."

"Ah! that is quite a different matter; elegant, certainly; but pretty, I don't agree with you!"

"It is so, though you don't agree with us!"

"Ladies, there is one reason why you are more beautiful than the Madrileñas; it is a reason which can be better appreciated by those who, like myself, have devoted themselves to the fine arts: here there is color and form, and there they do not exist. By good fortune, this very evening, I have the opportunity of noticing it and of making comparisons, which show most favorably for you. Now that we are allowed to contemplate what is ordinarily draped with great care, I can take my oath that you have those beautiful forms which we admire so much in Grecian statues and Flemish paintings, soft, white, transparent; while if you enter a Madrid drawing-room, you don't stumble upon anything else than skeletons in ball dresses —"

The ladies broke into laughter, hiding their faces behind their fans.

"What a tongue, what a tongue you have, Suárez!"

"It only serves me to tell the truth. The Madrid girls have the effect upon me of shadow-pantomimes. In you I find visible, palpable, and even delectable beings —"

Marta noticed that the wax of a candelabrum was burning out, and that the glass socket was in danger of cracking. She got up and went to puff it out. Then when she sat down again, she took a different position.

The pianist ended his fantasy without stumbling. The conversations stopped abruptly; some clapped their hands, and others said, "Very good, very good." No one had been listening to him, but the pianist felt himself rewarded for his fatigues, and raising his blushing face above the piano, he acknowledged his thanks to the company with a triumphant smile. A young fellow who wore his hair banged like the dandies of Madrid,

profited by this blissful moment to beg him to play a waltz-polka.

At the very first chords an extraordinary commotion was observable among the young men near the doors, who were evidently suffering from lack of exercise. A few began to draw on their gloves hastily; others smoothed back their hair with their hands, and straightened their cravats. One asked, with constrained voice,—

“It’s a mazurka, isn’t it?”

“No, a waltz-polka.”

“What! a waltz-polka?”

“Can’t you tell by your ears?”

“Ah, yes. You’re right. But then, señor, this wretched fellow at the piano will prevent me from dancing with Rosario this evening.”

All seemed restless and nervous as though they were about to pass through the fire. The boldest crossed the drawing-room with rapid steps, and joined the young ladies, hiding their trepidation behind a supercilious smile. As soon as the señorita who had been invited stood up and took the proffered arm, they began to feel that they were masters of themselves. Others, less courageous, gave three or four long pulls to their cigars, puffing the smoke out toward the entry, and having keyed themselves up to the right pitch, slowly directed their steps to some young lady less fascinating than the others, receiving for their attention a smile full of tender promises. The more cowardly struggled a long while with their gloves, and finally had to ask some grave señor to fasten the buttons for them. When this operation was finished, and they were ready to dance, they discovered that there were no girls sitting down. Thereupon they resigned themselves to dance with some mamma.

One after another all the couples took the floor. Marta remained sitting. Two or three very complaisant and patronizing young fellows came to invite her, but she replied that she did not know how to dance. The real motive of her refusal was that her father did not like to have her take part in society while she was so young. She sat, therefore, attentively watching how the others went round. Her great black eyes rested with placid expression on each one of the couples who went up and down before her. Some interested her more than others, and she followed them with her glance. Their ways, their movements, and their looks were so different, that they made a curious study. A tall, lean youth was bending his back as near double as possible, so as to put his arm around the waist of a diminutive señorita who was endeavoring to keep on her very tip-toes. An elderly and portly lady was leaning languidly over a boy's shoulder, besmearing his coat with Matilde Díez's *wax-white*. Some, like Isidorito, did not succeed in steering, and frequently stepped on their partners, who soon declared that they were weary and asked to be excused. Others put down their heels with such force that they scratched the floor. Marta looked at these with considerable severity, like a true housewife. After a while the faces began to show signs of weariness, some becoming flushed, others pallid, according to the temperament of each. With mouths open, cheeks aglow, and brows bathed in perspiration, they gave evidence of no other expression than that of absolute stupidity. At first they smiled and even dropped from their lips a compliment or two; but very soon gallantries ceased, and the smile faded away; all ended by skipping about silent and solemn, as if some unseen hand were laying on the lash in order to make

them do so. Marta from time to time shut her eyes, and thus she avoided the dizziness which began to attack her.

At last the piano suddenly ceased to sound. The couples, in virtue of the momentum which they had acquired, gave three or four hops unaccompanied by the music, and this made Marta smile. Before they took their seats the girls walked around the drawing-room for a few moments arm in arm with their partners, engaged in lively and interesting discourse. The pianist accepted the effusive thanks of the smart young man with the bangs. At length the ladies were all seated in their respective places, and the gentlemen fell back once again to the doors, mopping their brows with their handkerchiefs. Those who had danced with the beauties of the drawing-room showed faces shining with beatitude, and smilingly received the jests of their friends, while those who had pressed the less favored to their bosoms, praised to the skies their partners' Terpsichorean skill.

The youth with the hair over his forehead conceived the idea of Don Serapio singing a song, and he went from group to group around the room, making an instantaneous and satisfactory propaganda with his happy thought.

"Yes, yes, Don Serapio must sing!"

"Don Serapio must sing! Don Serapio must sing!"

"Gentlemen, for Heaven's sake—I have a very bad cold!"

"No matter; you will sing well enough, Don Serapio."

"A thousand thanks, ladies, a thousand thanks. I should wish at this moment that I had the voice of an angel, for angels only ought to sing to angels."

This compliment produced an excellent impression upon

the feminine element of the company. The masculine element received it with derisive smiles.

"We always enjoy great pleasure in listening to you; you know it very well."

"Because generosity ever goes in company with beauty. The face is the mirror of the soul, they say, and if that is true, how could you help being benevolent toward me?"

The second compliment was likewise received with a laugh of complacency by the ladies. The men continued to smile scornfully.

"Sing, sing, Don Serapio!"

"But supposing I am not in practice—I don't know how I can repay such kindness. Besides, I have lost my voice entirely."

Don Serapio let himself be urged for some time. At last he went toward the piano, escorted by a circle of ladies, to whom he addressed smiles and words full of honeyed sweetness, and managed to extract clandestinely a roll of music which he carried in the inner pocket of his coat. The pianist instantly saw through this manoeuvre, and came to his assistance by quietly taking the music from his hand.

"Don Serapio is going to sing—you are going to sing the romance *Lontano a te*," he said as he spread it out on the rack.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake! it is too sentimental, and these ladies are not now in favor of romanticism—"

"On the contrary, Don Serapio!" exclaimed one of the Delgado girls; "we women in this age of selfishness and calculation are the very ones who ought to worship sentiment and heart."

"Always as graceful as you are felicitous!" declared the vocalist, bowing to the floor.

The pianoforte introduction began. Don Serapio, before he uttered a note, kept arching his eyebrows, and he stretched his neck as much as possible, as a token of his feeling. He was upwards of fifty, although pomades, dyes, and cosmetics gave him from a distance the appearance of a young man. Near at hand, his mustachios, though waxed to perfection, were not sufficient to make up for the crows'-feet and wrinkles of every sort which lined his face. He was a manufacturer of canned goods, and a confirmed old bachelor; not because he failed to honor the fair sex and hold it in esteem, but because he thought that marriage was death to love and its illusions. Never was there a man more soft and honeyed in his conversation with ladies, and never was there a gallant who had a more abundant assortment of flatteries to lavish upon them. He made great use of such expressions as *the fire of passion*, *the loss of will power*, *perfumed breath*, *palpitations of the heart*, and other like elegancies, all sure of hitting the mark. This was as regards society women. As for work-girls and serving-maids, Don Serapio's gallantries did not stop with compliments. He was regarded as one of the most formidable and successful of seducers among such, and it was a matter of common knowledge in Nieva that more than one, and more than two, had had seriously to complain of his behavior, so that it brought about his head a tremendous scandal which he had hastened to hush with the fulness of his locker. As a general thing he led a regular life, rising very early, going to his factory to attend to his accounts and to inspect the spicing of his fish and oysters, and coming home about five o'clock in the afternoon to wash himself and dress for his promenade or his calls, which were not few, and which always ended at eleven o'clock in the evening.

The only reading for which he cared was that of romantic stories.

Don Serapio's voice was a trifle disagreeable. As one of the young wags among those clustering about the door said, no one could tell for a certainty if it were tenor, baritone, or bass. In compensation, he sang with sentiment fit to melt the rocks, as could be judged by the infinite movements of his eyebrows, and by the expression of disconsolateness which came over his face as soon as he stood in front of the piano; no one ever saw a face so wrinkled, so long drawn, so full of compunction. The romanza *Lontano a te*, better than any other, had the power of exciting his sensibility and giving his eyes an exceedingly hopeless expression.

While the proprietor of the canning factory was expressing in Italian his grief at finding himself far from his lady love, the elder daughter of the family was in the most retired part of the room still engaged in conversation with a youth of a pleasant, open countenance, with swarthy complexion, black eyes, and a young mustache.

"Enrique misunderstood my commission," said the youth. "I asked him to send me some jewelry worth something, but what he sent me is just about as commonplace as could be; so much so that I am thinking of sending it back to-morrow without showing it to you."

"Don't trouble about it any more; it's all the same one way or the other."

"What do you mean, 'all the same'? Since when, señorita, have you grown so indifferent to matters of the toilet? I am certain that if I were to bring you this jewelry, you would laugh me to scorn."

"Don't imagine such a thing."

"Perhaps you think I don't remember how you made

“The . of that hat that your aunt Carmen presented you a few days ago!”

“It was very wrong of me to make fun of it; but you are just as bad when you throw it in my face. The truth is that in the end one hat or one set of jewelry is as good as another.”

“Be it so! Keep it up! I know you well, and you can’t cheat me. The jewelry shall be sent back, and in its place we’ll have another set to my taste and yours. But let’s drop the subject. I had something to tell you, and I can’t remember what it was. Oh, yes! we must write to your uncle Rodrigo, for judging by the note I have just received from him, he doesn’t know yet the day on which we are to be married. I think we ought to write him both of us in the same letter; doesn’t it seem so to you?”

“Just as you like.”

“All right; I’ll come round to-morrow before dinner, and we’ll write it.”

Both remained silent a few moments and listened to the singing of Don Serapio, who was lamenting always with a more and more pathetic accent the solitude and sadness in which his mistress kept him. One of the Delgado señoritas lifted her handkerchief to her eyes, declaring in a low voice to those standing near that hitherto there had been few things that ever brought the tears into her eyes.

“What a bore that wretched Don Serapio is! he wrinkles up his forehead so that his wig is almost lifted off behind.”

“Don’t be so unkind. Have a little charity, and let the poor man enjoy himself without harming God or his neighbor.”

"As far as I am concerned he may sing till doomsday. But I notice, lassie, that for some time you have been becoming a great preacher. Are you thinking of entering into competition with the curé of the parish?"

"What I am anxious for is that you shouldn't be a backbiter. If you love me as you say you do, my good advice ought not to make you vexed."

"It doesn't make me vexed, loveliest; quite the contrary. I always listen to it with pleasure and follow it—when I can. You surely are acquainted with my ways, and know that I can't help making fun. However, you'll have time enough to preach to me all you want, won't you? Not only time enough but space enough. You can go on giving me sermons from Nieva to Madrid, then from Madrid to Paris, and from Paris to Milan, and from Milan to Venice, and thence to Rome and Naples, and back by Geneva, Brussels, Paris, and Madrid, home again. With what delight I shall travel through all these foreign countries listening to a preacher so devoted! How do you like the itinerary of our journey?"

"Well enough."

"Well enough! That isn't saying anything. One would think the subject didn't interest you as much as it did me. I won't fix it definitely till you have made such changes as you like in it, or vary it entirely, if it seem good to you. I am just as much interested in going to Berlin or London as to Paris and Rome. You can imagine how much difference it makes to me, if I go with you, which way we travel!"

"Whatever you decide upon will be well."

"Let us have it decided. Do you like the plan I propose? Yes or no?"

"I have told you yes already."

"But, lassie, what is the matter with you? You have scarcely allowed yourself to smile this whole evening, and you haven't said a word more than was strictly necessary. What is the reason of such solemnity? Are you put out with me?"

"What reason should I have to be?"

"Then I'll ask you *why* you are. You must be, since there's no other way of explaining the curt way in which you have been answering me this long time."

"That's your own imagination. I answer you just as I always do."

Ricardo, without speaking, looked at his betrothed, who turned away her eyes, fixing them on Don Serapio.

"It must be so, but I don't understand it. If you are really angry with me, it would be very unkind of you not to tell me why, so that I could repair my mistake, if perchance I had committed any. My conscience does not accuse me of anything—"

"I tell you that I am not angry; don't be so tiresome!"

Maria said these words with evident asperity, not turning her face from the singer. Ricardo again looked at her for a long time. •

"Very good—it is better so—still I thought—"

Both kept silence for some moments. Ricardo broke it, saying,—

"When Don Serapio has finished, they are going to make you sing; I am sure—all get good out of it except me."

"Why?"

"For two reasons: the first is, because much as I enjoy hearing you when we are alone, I don't like it when you sing before people; the second is, because they will take you away from me."

“I don’t see why you should dislike it because I sing before people. I am the one not to like it—and I don’t at all. As to the separation, that’s nonsense, because we are together much more than we ought to be.”

“It would be a long and difficult task for me to explain why I don’t like you to sing in public. As to the separation which you call nonsense, it’s the solemn truth. In spite of our being together several hours a day it seems to me very little. I could wish that we were together all the time. For a man who is going to be married inside of a month and a half, I don’t think that such a wish is very extraordinary.”

And lowering his voice, he added in a passionate tone :—

“I am never satisfied, and never shall be satisfied, however much I am with thee, my own life. In all the years since I have adored thee, never for a single instant have I felt the shadow of satiety. When I am near thee, I think that I could not be more content, even in heaven ; when I am away, I think how much happier I should be if I were with thee. This is a guaranty that we should never get tired of each other’s society ; isn’t it so ? For my part, I give thee my word that if we reach old age, I shall enjoy more by thy side than sitting in the sunshine ! What a happy life is waiting for us, and how long it is that I have dreamed about it ! Do you remember how one day in the big garden, when you were eight years old, and I was ten, my dear mamma made us take each other’s hands, saying to us in a serious tone : ‘ Would you like to be husband and wife ? Then kiss each other, and look out that you don’t quarrel any more.’ From that time forth I have never dreamed of the possibility of marrying any other woman than you.”

Maria made no reply to this fervid declaration. She

kept looking at the proprietor of the canning factory, with a strange expression, as though her thoughts were far away.

“Do you know one thing?”

“What?”

“That the chests have come with thy clothes, but I have not opened them yet. Both of them have on the lid thy cipher with the coronet of marchioness above. You may laugh at me, but I shall tell thee, all the same, that it made my heart leap to see the coronet. I imagined that we were already married, and that I hadn't to wait these everlasting forty-five days. I don't know what I wouldn't give if ~~to~~day were the last day of December. Tell me, don't you feel any inclination to call yourself the *Marquesa de Peñaalta*? to be mine, mine for ever?”

Maria arose from the sofa, and with a scornful gesture, nor deigning to look once at her lover, replied,—

“Well enough.”

And she went and sat down beside one of the numberless De Ciudad girls. Ricardo remained for a few moments glued to his seat, without stirring a finger. Then he got up abruptly and hastened from the room.

Don Serapio at last ceased mourning his lady's absence, declaring in a finale that if such a state of things existed longer, he should die without delay. The pianist added force to this wail of woe by performing a noisy run in octaves. A great clapping of hands was heard, and affectionate smiles of approbation were lavished by the ladies upon the vocalist. The young fellows near the doors, always ready for fun, did their best to bring about a repetition of the romanza, but Don Serapio was shrewd enough to perceive that the plaudits of these boys were not in good faith, and he refused to grant the favor.

Then the stripling with the banged hair made the following little speech to the assembled audience:—

“Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that now is the time for us to listen to the great artiste. We are all waiting impatiently for Maria to delight us—one of those happy moments—with which she has in days gone by delighted us. Isn’t it a good idea?”

“That’s it; Maria must sing!”

“Of course she will sing; she is very accommodating.”

The spokesman offered his arm to the young señorita, and led her to the piano.

When Maria was left standing alone, facing the audience, a thrill of admiration was excited as usual. “How lovely, how lovely she is!” “That girl grows prettier every day!” “What exquisite taste she shows in her dress!” “She looks like a queen!” These and many other flattering phrases were whispered among the friends of the Elorza family.

Without being very tall she was of stately stature and presence. She was slender, lithe, and graceful as those beautiful dames of the Renaissance, which the Italian painters chose as their models. The line of her soft lustrous neck reminded one of Grecian statues. This neck supported a shapely head; the face fair, the cheeks slightly rose-tinted, delicate, regular, transparent, with ruby lips and blue eyes. She bore a notable resemblance to Doña Gertrudis, but she had an attractive and fascinating expression which that celebrated lady never had, whatever may have been the persuasion of the lyric poet of the acrostics. Around her clear and brilliant eyes showed a slight violet circle, which gave her face a decided poetical tinge.

“Now Suárez, you will see what kind of a singer this girl is,” said one lady.

"I shall appreciate her, for this Señor Don Serapio has spoiled my ears for the time being."

"Oh! Maria is an artist."

"What I perceive just now is, that she has a stunning figure."

"You just wait till you hear her."

"That girl does everything well! If you could see how she draws!"

"Haven't the Elorzas any other daughters than this?"

"Yes, that other girl, who is sitting down over there; her name is Marta. She is going to be very handsome, too."

"Indeed, she is pretty; but she hasn't any expression at all. It's a common kind of beauty, while her sister—"

"Hush! she's going to begin." Then ensued a silence in the company such as had always been Don Serapio's ideal—unrealizable like all ideals. Maria sang various operatic pieces which were asked for, and needed no urging. When she finished, the plaudits were so eager and long that it made her blush.

Suárez assured his circle¹ of ladies that she had a voice which resembled Nantier Didier's, and that a short time at the conservatory would put her on an equality with the leading contraltos.

When the congratulations had ceased, and the looks of all had ceased to be fastened upon her, a shade of sadness came over Maria's lovely face. She went to Doña Gertrudis and whispered in her ear,—

"Mamma, I have a very severe headache."

"Ay! daughter of my heart, I sympathize with you I, too, am having my share of pain."

¹ *tertulia*.

"I should like to go to bed."

"Then go, my daughter, go. I will say that you are feeling a trifle indisposed."

"Adios, mamaita! Good night, and sleep well."

Maria kissed her mother's brow, and gradually, taking care not to be noticed, she left the parlor by the dining-room door. She stopped to get a drink of *eau sucré*, and stood a moment motionless, with her eyes fixed on vacancy. The shade of melancholy had greatly dulled the brilliancy of her face.

She passed out of the dining-room and crossed a long and pretty dark entry. At the end there was a door which led to a back stairway. She had mounted only four or five steps when she felt herself seized roughly by the arm, and uttered a cry of terror. Turning round, she saw with embarrassment the pale and troubled face of her betrothed.

"Ricardo! what are you doing here?"

"I saw that you left the dining-room, and I followed you."

"What for?"

"To hear for a second time from your lips the infamous words you said to me in the drawing-room. Do you think, perhaps, it isn't worth while to repeat them? Do you think, perhaps, that I can give up a whole past of love, a whole future of happiness, all the sweet dreams of my life, without calling you infamous, a hundred times infamous, a thousand times infamous, now right here, while we are together alone, afterwards in open society, and then before the whole world? Come, come back, you miserable girl—come back, and let me call you so before everybody!"

And Ricardo, pale and trembling like a gambler wh

has staked his last remaining money on a card, firmly grasped his sweetheart by the wrist and tried to drag her back to the parlor.

Maria hung her head and said not a word. Without offering any resistance she allowed him to pull her down the four or five steps of the staircase. But on reaching the passage-way, Ricardo felt on his cheek a warm kiss, which caused him to loose his captive and fall back with horror; instantly Maria's arms were wound around his neck, and on his lips he felt the imprint of other lips.

"Ricardo mio, for heaven's sake, don't put me to shame!"

These words, whispered in his ear with a passionate accent, were accompanied by a cloud of caresses. The young man pressed her close to his heart without answering a word; his emotion choked his utterance. When he became a little calmer, he asked her with trembling voice,—

"Do you love me?"

"With all my soul!"

"Was that nothing else but a moment of ill humor?"

"That was all."

"Oh, what a wretched time you have made me have! Not for all the gold in the world would I go through it again!"

"Tell me, haven't I made up for it now?"

"Yes, loveliest."

"Let me loose. I am going to lie down. I have such a headache!"

"Wait a minute. Let me kiss thee on thy forehead,—now another on thy eyes,—now another on thy lips,—now on thy hands!"

"Adios!"

"Adios!"

"Let me go, Ricardo, let me go!"

The young fellow, laughing with happiness, still held her by the hand. Maria struggled to escape, though she also was laughing.

"Come, let me go, don't be foolish."

"It shows I'm not foolish because I don't let you go!"

"Think how my head aches!"

"All right, then, I'll let you go."

"Till to-morrow! Be careful whom you dance with now."

"Don't you worry. I am going immediately. Till to-morrow!"

Maria tore herself away. Ricardo tried to catch her again, leaping up the dark staircase, but he did not succeed. The girl said good night¹ with a merry laugh from the top of the stairs.

When Ricardo returned to the parlor he was smiling like a happy man. The light of the chandelier somewhat dazzled him, and he hastened to sit down.

Maria's room, when she entered it, was plunged in darkness. She groped about for the matches and lighted a lamp of burnished iron. The room was furnished with a luxury and good taste rarely to be found in provincial towns. The furniture was upholstered in blue satin; the curtains and paper were of the same color. In the recess between the windows was a mahogany wardrobe with a full-length mirror. The dressing-table loaded down under the weight of its bottles stood against the opposite wall; the carpet was white, with blue flowers. The exquisite niceness with which all these objects were put in place, the elegance and coquetry of the furniture, and the deli-

¹ *buenas noches.*

cate fragrance perceptible on entering, clearly declared the sex and the station of the person who dwelt there.

When Maria lighted her lamp, her eyes met the eyes of an image of the Saviour which stood on the centre of the table where the light burned. It was on wood, beautifully carved and painted, with a decidedly sad and meek expression of the face, and it was this which had led the young woman to buy it. When she caught sight of the sweet but icy face of the image, the happy smile which still hovered over her lips died away, leaving her motionless and deeply thoughtful. Little by little, doubtless under the influence of the ideas which came into her mind, her face lost its usual expression and assumed one as melancholy and humble as that of a Magdalene. At that moment the sound of the piano came vibrating through the dark stairway, telling of the first movement of a fascinating rigadoun. She fell on her knees and bent her head. Every now and then she sobbed. Her lips were pressed convulsively against the naked feet of the Saviour, and muttered unintelligible words.

After a long time she raised her face bathed in tears, and exclaimed in a tone of woe:—

“My Jesus! what treachery! what treachery! How illy do I repay the love which thou hast bestowed on me. Punish me, Lord, so that I may again have peace of mind!”

Arising from the floor, she took the lamp in her hand and went into her bed-room. It was tiny and warm as a nest, and it was ornamented with a profusion of engravings of Jesus and the Virgin. The bed, covered with satin curtains, was white and delightful as a baptismal altar. She placed the lamp on her dressing-table and with more tranquil face quickly undressed.


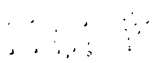
Then she took a travelling-mantle from the wardrobe, wrapped herself in it, blew out the lamp, made the sign of the cross time and again on her forehead, her mouth, and her breast, and lay down on the floor. The white bed, covered with satin and lawn, warm and perfumed, and full of sensuous delights, awaited her in vain all night. Thus she remained stretched on the floor till daylight dawned.

CHAPTER III.

THE NINE DAYS' FESTIVAL OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS.

DAY had hardly dawned, when our maiden arose suddenly from the floor. She stood motionless a moment with ear attent, but she did not catch the sound of the bells of San Felipe, which she thought she had heard in her dreams. She was mistaken; it was not yet six o'clock. She lighted her lamp, and going to her boudoir prostrated herself in humiliation before the image of Jesus and began to pray. As she wore nothing but a thin cambric night-dress, she naturally felt the cold through it, and began to shiver, but she would not yield, and she kept on with her prayers until her teeth chattered. Only then she decided to quit the position which she had taken and dress herself. Thereupon, she opened the four windows of her boudoir and blew out the lamp.

A peevish light, cold and chill, made its way into the Señorita de Elorza's room, giving the articles of furniture a lugubrious aspect quite different from what they usually bore. The morning chill also penetrated them as well as their mistress, and they stood silent and melancholy, doubtless hoping for the rays of the sun to show forth their beauty and splendor. Only in one spot or another, as the light fell on the varnish, there was a pale reflection which looked like the glassy, filmy eye of a dying person. The room was situated in a sort of square turret which was built in one of the rear angles of the



mansion ; it rose some yards above it, and was open to the light on all its four sides. The tower held only two apartments, — Maria's, composed of boudoir and bedroom, and her maid Genoveva's chamber, which was single. They were the coldest but at the same time the most cheerful rooms in the house. The few times that the sun deigned to visit Nieva he went straight to lodge in them, entered without as much as asking leave, in the way of sovereign guests, and spent the day, shining in the mirrors, brightening up the satin of the chairs, dulling the varnish of the clothes-presses, and in a word disporting himself in a thousand different ways, — all this, it may be said, would have been, had not Genoveva taken the precaution to draw the curtains in time. They were likewise the quietest ; the noises of the house did not reach them, and those from outside had no possibility of disturbing them, owing to their situation. Only the wind, which almost never ceased to blow heavily around the tower, made strange noises, especially at night, sometimes moaning, sometimes screaming, and constantly complaining because the windows were kept hermetically sealed. During the daytime it was neither melancholy nor petulant, but contented itself with a perpetual but very dignified murmur like sea-shells held to the ear.

Maria, still shivering though she was wrapped up in her shawl, went to one of the windows which looked down into the garden whose earthwall was contiguous to the quay. From that window the wonderful length of the Nieva River could be seen down to the delta, which was the place where it emptied into the sea. It did not measure more than a league in length, but its length varied wonderfully, according as it was seen in flood or water, at spring tide or neap tide. When the

tides, it spread out half a league, lapping up against the foot of the pine-covered hills which shut in the valley on both sides. At low tide the water drew out almost completely, leaving barely a narrow, sinuous thread in the centre. Between the conterminous line of hills there lay on both sides of the channel wide flats of soft gray mud, dotted with pools of water where the ragamuffins of the quay took delight in splashing and wallowing until they had besmeared themselves thickly enough to go straight and wash it off by diving head first into the channel. Above the garden wall rose the masts of a few vessels, not a dozen in all, anchored by the quay, the majority of them smacks and schooners¹ of insignificant draught.

The young girl looked for an instant at the sky, which was still profoundly dark towards the west, hiding and confusing the outline of the distant mountains. In the zenith she noticed that it was completely overcast, of an ashen color, which grew lighter as she turned her face toward the east. There the clouds were not as yet compacted into a solid mass as in the opposite quarter; they stood out against the sweep of the sky in monstrous black piles, and opened sufficiently to let the few feeble, melancholy, ruddy rays pass through, which the sun, like a dying fire, was beginning to shed upon the earth. The tide was rising. The surface of the river absorbed the slender light of the sky, and gave forth nothing more than a tremulous metallic reflection in the far distance.

After watching the sunrise for a time, our maiden got a book which lay on the dressing-table in her room, and came back to the window to see if she could read; but it was not yet light enough. She laid the book on a chair and again went to the window, leaning her forehead against

¹ *pataches* and *quechemarines*.

ts panes. The sky kept growing brighter in the direction of El Moral; but it added no life or good cheer to the earth. The growing light seemed only to make more distinct its stern, forbidding face. A wretched and disagreeable day was in prospect, such as the natives of Nieva were accustomed to enjoy the larger part of the year.

But soon the windows of the east were closed; the huge, thick clouds which had stood out separate, allowing the light to pass, once more made one unbroken mass, by the impulse of some breath of air, and the rosy flush faded away. In their place remained a uniform pallid light, which, little by little, spread over the heavens, lazily struggling with the shadows in the west. The far-away reflections on the river likewise died out, leaving it all a monotonous color, like unpolished steel. The boudoir slowly filled with light; the pretty articles of furniture, and the objects adorning it, emerged from the obscurity, graceful, dainty, and fascinating, like the dancers in the opera, when at an outburst from the orchestra they throw aside the spectral mantles in which they had wrapped themselves. The light, however, did not smile; all the time it grew more melancholy and forbidding. Across the mighty masses of dark violet cloud which were rising above the four or five houses of El Moral, others, small and white, began to fly like wisps of gauze — a sure sign of storm.

Maria quickly felt the pane against which she was leaning tremble. A gust of wind and rain had savagely lashed the window. She stepped back a little and saw that all the panes were weeping at once. For some little time she occupied herself in watching the more or less rapid and uneven course which the drops of water followed as they rolled down the smooth surface of the glass.

The sharp, intermittent pattering of the rain brought back to her memory the many afternoons that she had spent near that same window listening to it with an open book in her hand. The book had always been a novel. For more than four months she had incessantly begged her father to let her have the use of the boudoir in the tower so that she might give herself up entirely to her favorite occupation without fear of any one interrupting her. But Don Mariano feared to give his permission, because the apartments in the tower were cold, and the girl's health was delicate. At last, overcome by her entreaties and caresses, he yielded, after having the rooms carefully carpeted, and exacting the condition that Genoveva should sleep near by. It was a happy period for Maria. She was sixteen, and her mind was restless and high-spirited. Her music, in which she had made prodigious strides, had stimulated in her heart a decided tendency to melancholy and tears. She wept at the slightest provocation, sometimes without reason, and when it was least expected, but her tears were so sweet, and she experienced such intense pleasure in them, that on many occasions she fostered them artificially. How many times, gazing from that window upon the delicate clouds of the horizon tinted with rose or the last splendors of the dying sun, she felt her heart overcome by a depth of melancholy which found relief only in sobs! How many times she had pained her father with a storm of tears, the cause of which she could not tell, because she herself knew not! The knowledge of painting, in which she also excelled, turned her inclinations towards light and a wide outlook, and this equally contributed to make her long for the rooms in the tower. When once she had taken her quarters there with her piano, her paints, and her novels,

Maria looked upon herself as the most fortunate girl on earth. If at noon of some magnificent sunny day, under an effulgent azure sky, she opened all the windows of her boudoir and admitted the fresh, keen wind which toyed with her hair and scattered the papers from the table over the floor, she imagined with delight that she had mounted upon a star, and that she was in the midst of space, swimming through the air at the mercy of every chance. And this illusion, though it was hard for her to keep it up, made her happy. Sometimes at night she used to open the blinds and light not only her lamp, but all the candles in the candlesticks, so as to imagine that she was stationed in a lofty lighthouse. "From the river this tower must seem like a beacon, and my room the lamp which has just been lighted," was what she used to say, in childish delight. And then she began to peer through the panes to see if any ship were on its way down to El Moral, until, frightened by the darkness without and dazzled by the light within, she finally grew terror-stricken at such an illumination and hastened to extinguish the lights.

Don Mariano called that gay, aerial boudoir *Maria's bird-cage*; and in truth the name was admirably appropriate, for the girl was constantly flitting about in it, moving the furniture and changing the things from one place to another, nervous and restless as a bird. To make the resemblance more complete, it often happened that when the family were gathered in the dining-room they heard the distant trills of some cavatina or romanza which Maria was studying. Don Mariano failed to exclaim, with his usual benignant smile, "The little bird is singing." And all would likewise be full of content, for everybody in the house loved and admired the girl.

In two or three years a cargo of novels had made their way into the tower boudoir, and been sent away again, after having diverted the long leisure hours of our young friend, who put under contribution, not only her father's library and her own purse, but likewise the book-shelves of all the friends of the family. Don Serapio was her first purveyor, and thus for a long time she read only blood-thirsty accounts of terrible and unnatural crimes, in which the proprietor of the canning factory took such intense delight. In this period she did not enjoy much, for, though these novels excited her curiosity to the highest degree, keeping it in suspense and under the spell of the reading a large part of the day and night, yet no sweet or poetic aftertaste was left in her mind for her delectation, and she forgot them the day after she read them.

Moreover, they terrified her too much; many and many times they disturbed her dreams, and even on some occasions she begged Genoveva to lie down beside her, for she was frightened to death. After exhausting Don Serapio's library, she asked one of the Delgado sisters to give her the freedom of hers, which had the reputation of being abundantly supplied. In fact, it was furnished with a great quantity of novels, all of the primitive romantic school, and elegantly bound, but many of them soiled by use. In the more tender passages many of the pages were marked by yellow spots, which was a manifest sign that the various ladies into whose hands the book had fallen had shed a few tears in tribute to the misfortunes of the hero. We already know that one Señorita de Delgado wept with great facility. Among the novels which she read at this time were *Ivanhoe*; *The Lady of the Lake*; *Maclovio and Federico, or the Mines of the Tyrol*; *Saint Clair of the Isles, or the Exiles on the Island*

of *Barra*; *Oscar and Amanda*; *The Castle of Aguila Negra*; and others. These gave her very much greater enjoyment. Absolutely absorbed, heart and soul, she explored the region of those delicious fantasies with which the illustrious Walter Scott, and other novelists not so illustrious, delighted our fathers, creating for their use a middle age peopled with troubadours and tournaments, with stupendous deeds of prowess, with Gothic castles, heroes, and indomitable loves. What exercised the greatest fascination upon the Señorita de Elorza was the unchangeable steadfastness of affection always manifested by the protagonists of these novels. Whether man or woman, if a love passion seized them, it was labor wasted to raise any barriers, for everything was idle; across the opposition of fathers and guardians, and in spite of the crafty schemes laid by jilted suitors, purified by a thousand different tests, suffering much, and weeping much more, at the end they always came out triumphant and well deserved it all. The Señorita de Elorza vowed secretly in the sanctuary of her heart to show the same fealty to the first lover whom Providence should send her, and imitate his fortitude in adversities. Each one of these novels left a lasting impression on her youthful mind, and for several days, provided that the characters of some other did not succeed in captivating her, she ceaselessly thought of the beautiful miracles accomplished by the heroine's love, pure as the diamond and as unyielding, and taking up the action where the novelist had left it, which was always in the act of celebrating the nuptials of the afflicted lovers, she continued it in her imagination, conceiving with all its minutiae the after-life spent by the husband and wife surrounded by their children, and re-reading with folded hands the places where her

tears had so often been shed. Our maiden was anxious for one of these irresistible and melting passions to take possession of her heart, but it never entered her mind that any of the young fellows who visited her house dressed in a frock-coat or *Americana* could inspire it. Love, for her, always took the form of a warrior, whom she imagined with helmet and breastplate, coming breathlessly and covered with dust, after having unhorsed his competitor with a lance-thrust, to bend his knee before her and receive the crown from her hand, which he would kiss with tenderness and devotion. Again, stripped of his helmet, and in the disguise of a beggar, yet evincing by his gallant port the nobility and courage of his race, he came by night to the foot of her tower, and accompanying himself on the lute, sang some exquisite ditty in which he would invite her to fly with him across country to some unknown castle, far from the tyranny of her sire and the hated spouse whom he wished to force upon her. The night was dark, the sentinels of the castle benumbed with a philter, the ladder already clung close to the window, and the champing steeds were pawing the ground not very far away. "Why dost delay, O mistress mine, why dost delay?" Maria heard a gentle tapping on the panes, and more than once she had risen from her bed, in her bare feet, to satisfy herself that it was not her warrior but the wind who called her, sighing. At that time she could not see a vessel making for the port at night, without trembling; the mystery which always attends a vessel seen in the darkness made her vaguely imagine an ambuscade laid by some ignorant, brutal suitor, who, fearing lest he be rebuffed, wished to ravish her away by main force from her home, and bear her away to distant strands where he might enjoy with her

his barbarous pleasure. All that she needed to become disillusionized was to perceive the vessel carefully warping up to the quay and discharging a few barrels and boxes. But the romance which made the profoundest impression upon her was, without question, that entitled *Matilde, or the Crusades*. This, better than any other, was able to carry her mind back to that strange, brilliant epoch of which it treated, causing her to be present during that heroic struggle under the walls of Jerusalem. It is easy to comprehend, however, that it was not the battles between Infidels and Christians which most interested her in the tale, but that wierd, improbable love, tender and passionate at once, which sprang up in the heroine's heart for one of the Mohammedan warriors who had laid violent hands on the Sepulchre of the Lord. The Señorita de Elorza absolved and almost with her whole heart sympathized with this passion where the sin of loving one of the most terrible enemies of Christ offered a more powerful attraction and a keener zest. How was it possible not to fall in love with that famous Malec-Kadel, so fiery and terrible in battle, so gentle and submissive with his ladylove, so noble and generous on all occasions! Ah! if she had been in Matilde's place, she would have loved in the same way in spite of all laws, human and divine! This Infidel was the character who captivated her the most of all, even to the point of inspiring her to make a very clever painting in which she represented him on the deck of a ship when he was sailing with Matilde, saving her from the attacks of her enemies, protecting her with his left hand, and cutting off heads with his right hand, as one reaps the corn in summer. What best brought her to realize her dream, was the arrival of a Turk at Nieva, selling

of-pearl ornaments and slippers. She was so surprised to see him pass in front of the house, and her curiosity was so excited, that she was not content until she had addressed him, and made him undergo a long series of questions about the fields of Jerusalem where the love scenes which so impressed her had taken place, about the customs, the dress, and the government of the Mohammedans; but the Turk, either because he was not in the humor of parleying, or because of his being a native of Reus in the province of Tarragona, and having never been in Palestine in his life, answered her questions with impudent curtness.

It had now been a long time, however, since Maria had taken up a novel. The recollection of the time when she had devoured so many caused a slight contraction of her features, and drew in her smooth brow a wide, deep furrow.

The blasts of wind fraught with rain lashed the panes of glass for a long time, until they had given them a thorough washing. Gradually its gusts became less frequent, and at last they completely ceased. The light, meantime, had increased, mantling the whole of the murky heavens, and now bringing into relief the forms of the far western hills which were visible through the opposite casement. But the windows of the sky which gave passage to the rosy rays when the sunrise first began, did not open again, and all the clouds of the celestial vault united into one, like an ash-colored or grayish mantle, which gave free course to the rain and hindered the light. The storm, as usual, dissolved into a fine drizzle, which began to fall slowly, filling the atmosphere with an evanescent, tremulous veil, woven of watery threads, which still more diminished the bril-

liancy of the growing light, and hid the outlines of distant objects. The tide was still flowing; the wide sheet of water which stretched away to El Moral assumed a color earthy near its edges, but dark and heavy in the centre.

Maria again took up her book, brought her chair to the window, and sitting down, began to read, it now being light enough to allow it. It was the *Life of Saint Teresa*, written by herself, — a book bound in solid pasteboard covers, which were stamped with the gilt ornamentations characteristic of religious works.

According as the young girl became absorbed in her reading, her face grew more and more serene, and the deep frown on her brow disappeared. She was reading the second chapter in which the Saint sets forth how in the years of her youth she was enamored with books of knight-errantry, and the vanities of the toilet, and hints at the love affairs which at the same time she had passed through. When Maria raised her eyes from the book, they shone with a peculiar delight of inward content.

The bells of San Felipe at last actually began to ring. Maria quickly threw down her book and opened her maid's chamber-door.

"Genoveva! Genoveva!"

"I am awake, señorita."

"Get up; San Felipe's bells are ringing!"

In a twinkling Genoveva was up, dressed, and on hand in her mistress' room. She was a woman of forty years, more or less, short, fat, swarthy, with puffy cheeks, with great, protuberant gray eyes which were expressionless, absolutely expressionless, and with thin hair waving on her temples. She wore a plain carmelite skirt, and the black merino cloak gathered at the shoulders, such as

are used by all provincial serving-women. She had entered the household when Maria was not yet a year old, to be her nurse, and she had never left her, being a notable example of a faithful, steadfast servant.

“How long has my little dove¹ been dressed?”

“About an hour already, Genoveva. I thought I heard the bells, but I was mistaken. Now they are ringing in good earnest. Let us not lose any time; take the umbrellas, and let us go.”

“Whenever you please, señorita; I am all ready.”

Both put on their mantillas, and trying not to make any noise, they went down to the entry, carefully unlocked and opened the door, and sallied forth into the street, which they crossed with open umbrellas until they reached the opposite arcade.

The little city of Nieva, as it seems to me I have already said, has almost all of its streets lined with an arcade on one side or the other, sometimes on both. As a general thing it is small, low, uneven, and supported by single round stone pillars, without ornamentation of any sort. Likewise it is ill paved. Only in occasional localities, where some house had been reconstructed, it was wider and had more comfortable pavement. If all the houses were to be rebuilt, — and there is no doubt that this will come in time, — the town, owing to this system of construction, would have a certain monumental aspect, making it well worthy of being seen. Even as it is now, though it does not boast of much beauty, it is very convenient for pedestrians, who need not get wet except when they may wish to pass from one sidewalk to the other. And certainly its illustrious founders were far-sighted, for, as regards constant, ceaseless rain, there is

¹ *palomita*.

no other place in Spain that can hold a candle to our town.

Protected from the rain, mistress and maid crossed through one corner of the Plaza, and entered a long, narrow, solitary street. The worthy inhabitants were sleeping the sweet sleep of morning. Only from time to time they met some sailor wrapped up in his rough water-proof capote, who, with fishing-utensils in his hand, and making a great clatter with his enormous boots, was striding towards the quay.

"Are you well protected, señorita? See, there's been a frost; one would think it was already January."

"Yes; I put on a velvet waist, and besides, this sacque is well wadded."

"Well, well, sweetheart.¹ If your papa knew that we were out so early, he would scold me for consenting to it. You are exceedingly virtuous, señorita. Few or none would lead such a saintly life at your age."

"Hush, hush, Genoveva! don't say such a thing. I am only a miserable sinner; much more miserable than you have any idea of."

"Señorita, for Heaven's sake—I am not the only one who says so; but everybody. Yesterday Doña Filomela told me that she was edified to see you go to mass, and take the Blessed Sacrament, and she would give any if her daughters would do the same. And I don't wonder, she wishes so, for one of 'em, the youngest, is the devil's own. Would you believe, the other day, señorita, she scratched her sister right in church because one was confess before the other. Pretty kind of repentance. It's shameful, señorita, it's shameful to see how some women go to church! One would think that they were

¹ *mi corazón.*

their own houses! Ay! the poor little things don't realize that they are in the house of the Lord of heaven and earth, who will ask them to give account of their sin. Hasn't Doña Filomela shown you the rosary which her brother sent her from Havana? It is a marvel! all ivory and gold, with a great crucifix of solid gold. To say your prayers there's no need of such extravagance, is there, señorita?"

"To pray one needs only a pure and humble heart."

"Ay! señorita, how well you speak! It seems as if they were mistaken who say that you are not more than twenty years old. But when God wishes to pour out his gifts on one of his creatures, it makes no difference whether she be young or old, rich or poor. Every day I pray the most Blessed Virgin to preserve your health, so that you may serve as an example for those who are in mortal sin."

"What you ought to pray for, Genoveva, is that He will purify my soul and pardon the many sins that I have committed."

"God have mercy! if you need to be forgiven, you who are so pious and humble-minded, what would the rest of us need? Don't be so severe upon yourself. Fray Ignacio has so much esteem for you that he never wearies of sounding your praises; and that too, though he's not very indulgent, as you know. At this very moment I suppose that holy man's in the sacristy, listening to people! What a healthy man he is! It must be because God makes him so. He doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep, he doesn't rest a moment. And yet every day he grows stronger and stronger, and has greater and greater zeal in serving God. I don't see how he can spend so many hours in the confessional, without taking something to

eat. Only the Lord can give him the power. Blessed be His name forever! Amen!"

"That's true; God works real miracles in him because there is need in the world. Oh, God! what would have become of my soul if these holy missionaries had not come to open my eyes!"

"Though they have helped greatly in the way of salvation, still, before they came you were very good and used to attend the Sacraments."

"How little that amounts to, Genoveva, when the deepest nooks and corners of the conscience are not looked into!"

"Tell me, señorita, did you see in your dreams last night that beautiful bird with fiery feathers, with a cross in its bill, which you have seen lately?"

Maria stopped suddenly short and raised her hand to her breast as though she had received a blow. Then she began to walk on again, exclaiming in an undertone, —

"Last night I was not allowed to see it!"

"Why not, sweetheart?"

She made no reply. She walked on a while, and a groan escaped her. Then she stopped once more, and throwing her arms around her maid's neck, she began to sob bitterly.

"I am very wicked, Genoveva, very wicked! My heart has not yet been freed from impurities; the flesh and the devil will hold me in their sway. If you knew what a sin I committed yesterday!"

"Hush, hush! don't be discouraged! What would you have committed, you lamb?"¹

"Yes, yes; I am more wicked than you imagine. The more light I receive from God, the deeper I see

¹ *cordera*.

into the darkness ; the more He heaps blessings upon me, the more ungrateful I am toward Him."

"God is infinitely merciful, señorita."

"But infinitely just, as well."

"Beseech the aid of Saint Joseph the blessed ; there is no fault which the Lord does not forgive through his intercession. Come, stop crying now ; you are going to confession, and all is going to be forgiven."

After the girl had calmed down a little, they proceeded on their way, till they reached a rather diminutive plaza, fronted by the stern, gray façade of a great church which attracted attention neither by its beauty nor by any other quality, good or bad. They crossed a portico, huge and gray like the façade, and entered the temple, which was likewise gray and enormous ; these qualities were its only characteristics. It consisted of three naves, the central one broad and lofty like a cathedral ; those on the sides narrow and low ; all three had been whitewashed at some time very remote, but were now thick with dust, peeling in various places and stained with wide-spread, mysterious spots. The altars, which were profusely adorned, presented a gray color, very distinct from the gilding which originally had covered them. Through its dirty glass could be seen the stiff image of some saint with metal aureole, or the sad anguished face of an Ecce-Homo.

It was too early in the morning to find many people. Nevertheless, scattered here and there, praying on bended knees before the altars, a few women with covered heads were to be seen ; others pressed up to the latticed windows of the confessional and held their mantillas on both sides of their faces, while with a half-audible whispering they confided their misdeeds to the sacred tribunal of the Church. A few priests, who kept the doors of the confes-

sionals open, could be seen in cassock and hood, bending forward, with their ears to the window, reflecting in their frowning faces and negligent attitude the weariness which they felt; others kept theirs hermetically sealed, and scarcely could any one in passing perceive the presence of a human being.

A few places in the sanctuary were bathed in a melancholy light, but the corners and the hollows between the pillars were left in almost perfect darkness. The huge brazen lamps swung in the spaces on cords attached to the roof. The leaded window of the two huge, open oriels, high up in the walls of the great central nave, admitted a sad sheet of light, extending like a pale altar-cloth before the principal shrine. On one side of this, at some little distance, was another small portable altar, upon which was raised an image of the Saviour with perforated breast, wherein was seen a bleeding heart, wearing a crown of thorns and haloed with flames; around the image were a host of lighted candles, the hissing and crackling of which sounded lugubrously in the immense, silent circuit of the church. It was the altar set up because of the Nine Days' Festival of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was celebrated at that time.

Genoveva went to the sacristy to ask the priest if her señorita could make her confession. The priest remained kneeling near the confessional, waiting for the priest. She felt a peculiar, timid impatience, fear mingled with anxiety and desire. The sacristy was filled with a mingled odor of dampness and dust, of extinguished candles and of faded flowers, which inspired her with veneration. The moments preceding confession were filled with a delicious suspense for Maria. The circumstance and mystery which surrounded that intimate

confidence, the most intimate in the world, exerted a certain fascination over her mind, and agitated her to the very depths of her being, without loathing. She felt slight chills run over her body, followed by flushes of heat, which mounted to her face and set it on fire. At that moment she thought not so much of her sins as of the way in which she should try to tell them.

Fray Ignacio's dark, resolute, and stern figure hastened up to the confessional, and without vouchsafing his penitent a single glance, took his place within it. Maria, tremulous and with melting heart, drew near the little window. When at the end of a half-hour she turned away, her eyes were red and her cheeks were pale.

The church, meantime, had been slowly filling, although almost exclusively with women. A few ventured as far as the centre, making with their wooden shoes a real clatter as they walked on the tiled pavement; the most took them off at the door and carried them in their hands. The women of the people were in the majority, but there were a goodly number of señoras: men were few. The multitude for some time remained scattered about, kneeling at the altar rails, all making their devotions. From time to time an acolyte in flesh-colored balandran and white surplice, with shaven head and crafty eyes, rang his bronze hand-bell, and a few women left their places and stationed themselves before some altar where a priest, decked with golden ornaments, was beginning the sacrifice of the mass. After consuming the elements, he would administer the communion to two or three sets of women. Maria, with head bent on her bosom and hands devoutly crossed, joined them to receive the Holy Eucharist. When the priest placed on her tongue the consecrated particle, amid the dull, hushed murmur of

the throng, she felt her cheeks slightly inflamed by the grandeur of the miracle which had taken place within her; then she withdrew three or four steps from the altar, overwhelmed with veneration, and without venturing to cast a look on either side, at the end of a short space she left her place and went to repeat the prayers imposed as her penance. An elderly clergyman in a surplice mounted the pulpit, which was covered with a cloth of gold tissue. The faithful came flocking from the remotest parts of the church towards the centre, forming a dense throng about the pulpit. Maria and Genoveva stood in the midst of it. The priest made the sign of the cross, and began his Ave Marias and Pater Nosters in a loud voice. When the rosary was ended, he began the service, the novena of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The clergyman put on an enormous pair of spectacles, and in a snuffing, doleful tone exclaimed:—

“*O Heart (Corazón)*” — the multitude repeated after him with solemn acclaim, prolonging the words — “*O Heart (Corazoooón)* — *most lovable (amantísimo)* — *most lovable (amantísimooo)* — *most sacred (santísimo)* — *most sacred (santísimooo)* — *and honey-sweet (melífluo)* — *and honey-sweet (melífluoo)* — *of my divine Jesus* — *of my divine Jesus* — *full of flames* — *full of flames* — *of pure love (amor)* — *of purest love (amoooo)* — *consume me entirely* — *consume me entirely* — *and grant me — and grant me — a new life — a new life — of love and of grace — of love and of grace; — kindle and consume — kindle and consume — my lukewarmness — my lukewarmness.* *O Heart (Corazón)* — *O Heart (Corazoooón)* — *most comfortable (dulcísimo)* — *most comfortable (dulcísimooo)* *I adore thee — I adore thee — most profoundly — most profoundly.* — *Grant me grace — Grant me grace —*

loving Heart (Corazón) — O loving Heart (Corazooón) — to atone for — to atone for — the insults and ingrati- tudes — the insults and ingrati- tudes — done against thee (Vos) — done against thee (Vooos) — and what I pray thee for — and what I pray thee for — in this novena — in this novena — is for the greater glory of God (Dios) — is for the greater glory of God (Diooos) — and of my soul — and of my soul — Amen — Amen."

Maria merely whispered the words of the orison and kept her eyes fastened on the ground. Genoveva repeated them aloud, looking straight into the priest's face. The multitude sighed after they said Amen.

When the orison was ended, the priest repeated three Pater Nosters and three Ave Marias in honor of the three marks of the passion with which the divine Heart of Jesus showed itself to the Blessed Mother Margarita of Alacoque. The faithful knelt in reply. Immediately began a new orison like the first, addressed to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Then the priest recommended all to beseech God through the mediation of the Sacred Hearts for whatever each most needed, and the congregation meditated silently for a few moments. Maria prayed fervently that God would make her a better woman. Genoveva spent some time in hesitation, without knowing what to ask for, and at last she asked for patience to endure the suffering of her influenza. The priest read with his snuffling voice, which drawled over the syllables like a lamentation, the following

ILLUSTRATION.

"In the city of Munich there lived not many years ago a lady of extraordinary beauty, who led such an exemplary life, that all gave her the name of saint. It happened

that one day there came to her house a very lively young man to visit her, on the ground that she was one of his own cousins, and instantly the devil managed to get complete possession of him. His passion was so mad and wretched that at the end of some time she yielded to an impure sin, thus gravely offending God. After she fell into this sin she found herself sunk in a deep abyss of melancholy, for though the unhappy woman immediately sent away the one who had been the cause of her fault, she believed that she was doomed to hell. She began to lead an austere life, mortifying herself with fasting and penitence, and yet she could not escape the horrible thought. At length, by the advice of a pilgrim who happened to pass that way, she determined to make a novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the night of the fifth day of constant prayer, being in bed, she heard a great disturbance, and saw flying from her house a demon, horribly howling and leaving behind him an intolerably fetid odor. On the following morning she found herself cured of her melancholy, and very confident of the infinite mercy of God."

The faithful crowded closer around the pulpit to hear the illustration, and they took in with delight its romantic flavor. The novena ended with a sermon in Latin. The congregation repeated an Ave Maria and a Credo. The clergyman descended from the desk.

There was a loud and prolonged noise in the church. The throng of women spread out, dispersed, moved to and fro, gossiping and chattering all at once. The clattering of the wooden shoes was heard on the damp and filthy blocks of the pavement. A general commotion began to snuff out the candles burning around the image of Jesus and, standing on the altar, with his hands joined and

mischievous eyes made profane grimaces at the other boys, whose mothers kept them on their knees saying their prayers. A few of the clergy issued from the confessionals and crossed over to the sacristy with long strides. One was detained in the centre of the church by various ladies, and stood talking with them a long time, though with evident anxiety to escape from them. Through the leaded panes of the great oriels poured all the daylight evaporating the mysteriousness of the temple, and making it seem melancholy, wretched, and dirty, as in reality it was. Two or three gay fellows, with coat-collars turned up and sleeves well pulled down, came in, casting quick glances of curiosity at all the places. A sacristan took it into his head to throw wide open the wooden screen at the door, and a restless, noisy multitude, who had not been early enough to take part in the novena, surged into the vast room to listen to the word of a missionary, who at that moment mounted the pulpit with a contemplative, zealous gesture.

When he stood up dominating the multitude, with the sacred dove made of painted wood above his head, the noise gradually subsided. The congregation, wonderfully increased, again crowded together beneath the lecturer. There were many men who came not out of pure devotion, but rather with the intention of judging the sermon from a literary point of view.

Meantime great throngs of people came pouring in through the door, disturbing the faithful, and hindering the establishment of silence. Maria and Genoveva were pulled to and fro many times by the fluctuation of the multitude. The orator waited vainly for the bustle to cease. At last he extended his arm in academic style toward the door, and shouted emphatically, as though he were in the heart of his discourse,—

"Close that screen!"

The doors closed slowly, as though no one had touched them. The faithful were seating themselves in their places. For a time much coughing was heard; at last it ceased, and the church preserved a fragile, artificial silence, frequently broken by some stubborn cold or by the trumpet blast of some nose being blown. The jet and mother-of-pearl beads of the ladies' rosaries, clinking together, made a soft, melancholy tintillation.

The orator was young, tall, and slender, with great black eyes deep set in a pale, classic face. He also wore a cassock with surplice and cowl. He inspired respect by his sweet, gentle gravity.

He took off his cowl, and said a few words in Latin which no one could hear. Then putting on his cowl again, and leaning far over the railing, he exclaimed in a loud voice,—

"Beloved Brethren in Jesus Christ!"

He possessed a ringing voice, of a sweet and sympathetic quality, which lent a greater effect to the solemnity of the face. He began by showing an ironical astonishment that there were to be found any at all willing to abandon the vanities of the world to listen to the word of God, and he warmly congratulated the faithful who had come to take part in the Nine Days' Festival of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Of all the forms of devotion, invented by piety, most grateful in the eyes of the Lord was this; for it summed up and included all the rest. Hence, "as the heart in the human body represents the soul and substance,—the very centre of the physical organism—in the same way the Sacred Heart of our Redeemer is the centre of pious souls and the focus of light and love,—to revolve our aspirations for immortal glory." He

his exordium by invoking with impassioned phrases the aid of this Sacred Heart in letting his discourse bring forth fruit. He offered in behalf of all an Ave Maria.

He devoted the first part of his sermon to the description of the torment of the soul alienated from God by sin, and he drew a circumstantial and complete picture of the griefs and insults which we daily inflict upon the gentle Heart of Jesus. When he came to paint the sufferings caused by sin, he abandoned the beaten track of speaking of the material torments of hell and described nothing but the spiritual anguish, the pangs, and the heartbreak felt by the soul when it sees itself deprived through its own fault of the love of the Creator; but he painted them in such gloomy colorings, and with such power of expressions, that that infinite affliction, that depth of solitude, that silence and darkness made a greater impression on the imagination of the throng than the fire and the worm usually invoked.

Maria was filled with fear and sadness. She remembered her sins, and thought with horror that she might die suddenly and be lost forever. Thereupon she made a solemn vow to grow better. But how? To change her way of living meant nothing else than to break the bond which most powerfully fettered her to the earth and sin. She became the prey to a profound disturbance replete with tears, and she could not throw it off. The clear, musical voice of the priest resounded through the great room, unweariedly relating one by one the sufferings of the damned. The congregation listened motionless and terrified. Far away in the background, near the principal altar, the image of the Saviour, encircled with candles, looked like a great red blur whose rays cast fugitive shadows across the walls of the edifice.

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“But the divine compassion is inexhaustible. There is no sin so enormous that it cannot be blotted out by the mercy of God. The Saviour’s love for the souls that he has redeemed by his blood is not weak and limited like that of men ; like a loving father, like an affectionate spouse, He is even ready to open his arms for the repentant sinner. Man sooner tires of sinning than God of granting forgiveness, for we have at His right hand an advocate who never wearies of interceding for us. Sin not, offend not the Divine Majesty, either with words or deeds ; but if ye should give way to sin, be not discouraged, keep up good heart and return to God. *Sed et si quis peccaverit, advocatum habemus apud Patrem, Jesum Christum justum*, says Saint John.¹ If ye should sin, wash with repentant tears the Redeemer’s feet after the pattern of Saint Mary Magdalene, and ye shall be saved. Remember that sad, sinful woman, who, worn out with grief, appalled with love, threw herself at Jesus’ feet and washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair and anointed them with ointment, while not a word fell from her lips because she was consumed with the fire of love. Oh, tears shed for God ! how much ye avail, how great your power, how mighty your results ! In winning forgiveness tears are more potential than words ; for tears, as Saint Maximus says, are silent prayers, and demand not forgiveness if forgiveness be undeserved. There is no deception possible with tears as with words, and thus it was Saint Peter to win forgiveness for his fault used not words, since with them he had sinned, had blasphemed the Holy Lord but he wept with bitter lamentation and was pardoned. Tears are money which cannot be feited, our only refuge : they purge the soul

¹ 1 John ii. 1.

our transgressions, they appease the anger of God, they win us forgiveness, they enliven the soul, they strengthen faith, magnify hope, kindle charity. The divine Jesus himself has said, 'Blessed are they who mourn; for they shall be comforted.'"

Maria felt her heart melt within her. That fervid eulogy of tears drove fear from her breast. The thought of the inexhaustible good will of Jesus Christ, who, after suffering so much and shedding his precious blood for us, forgets each moment the greatest sins, if only they are confessed to him with repentance, stirred her to the depths of her soul. She seemed to see the saint whose name she bore, Mary Magdalene, bathed in tears at the Redeemer's feet, and she felt that she had done the same. A torrent of tears burst from her eyes as she imagined herself prone before Jesus. The women around her saw her weep, and they cast respectful glances of admiration at her as they whispered among themselves.

The sermon ended by exhorting the faithful, with lofty flights of eloquence rich in imagery, to devote themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "A quarter of an hour every day of loving discourse with this Sacred Heart brings to the soul the purest joy that it can have on earth. *Gustate, et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus.*¹ Try to hold converse a while with the Lord, and ye will enjoy the delights of heaven and the rarest satisfactions, such as those have who love. All that is in this world is folly and deception: banquets, comedies, receptions, amusements, and all the rest that the world considers good are mingled with gall and sown with thorns. Doubt not that the Heart of Jesus gives greater delight and comfort to those souls which seek it with devotion and self-abnega-

¹ Psalms xxxiv. 8.

tion, than the world with all its pastimes and insipid pleasures. What delight to be speaking for one instant with the most lovable Jesus, forever ready to hearken our prayers! To unbosom one's self to him alone as a most intimate friend. To demand his grace, his love and his glory! Oh, my dear friends *gustate et videte, gustate et videte!*"

The orator ended the final clauses of his sermon always with those words, *gustate et videte, gustate et videte*. When he ended by expressing his wish that all might be blessed, he was pale with weariness. Drops of sweat rolled down his wide brow. He had concluded his discourse with growing agitation and enthusiasm, which he succeeded in communicating to his hearers. Maria, after her first fit of weeping, remained comforted and almost happy. Genoveva whispered in her ear while the priest was descending from the pulpit, —

"Señorita, I just saw Don César in the congregation."

The young girl's face changed slightly. The crowd began to dissolve, spreading out over the whole area of the church. The majority of the people crowded tumultuously to the door, struggling to get out. After some difficulty Maria and Genoveva succeeded in reaching the portico, and started on their homeward way. But the Señorita de Elorza kept frequently turning her head. An elderly gentleman, tall, slender, and pale, with goatee and long white mustachios, dressed in black from head to foot, was following them at a considerable distance. As they entered the arcade of a narrow and lonely street, the caballero hastened his steps, and the two women lingered for him, so that very soon they were together. The caballero turned to Maria and said in a low voice, —

“Señorita, last night I returned from where you know.”

“I have prayed God to bring you back in safety, Don César.”

“Thanks, thanks.¹ Have you finished embroidering the banner?”

“Yes, señor!”

“And the flannel hearts?”

“Those also.”

“That is good, señorita; I shall not forget your diligence and enthusiasm.”

Don César did not move a line of his vigorous face during this conversation. His eyes, which were of a strange intensity gleaming with ferocity, did not for a moment leave the girl's face. He said nothing for a time, having something in his mind, and then he broke the silence, speaking in the curt tone of command, —

“To-morrow at this time be on hand again. We have some commissions to give you.”

“I will not fail you.”

Don César noticed that two young men had just turned the corner and were coming toward them; thereupon, without saying farewell, he left the women, crossing to the opposite sidewalk.

¹ *gracias*.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA WAS CONVERTED INTO DUKE OF THURINGEN.

A FEW days later Ricardo set forth from home as usual about ten o'clock in the morning and turned his steps toward the house of his betrothed. It was not love alone that impelled him to walk the street so early, but as much the melancholy solitude that reigned at the present time in the vast seignorial mansion where he lived: for our hero had been alone in the world a little more than a year. His father, the old Marqués de Peñalta, had died when he was under six, and he had scarcely more than a vague remembrance of his pale face between the sheets of the bed when they raised him up to give him a kiss a few hours before he died. He remembered also how on that same day every one had hugged him and kissed him, with tears, and this had attracted his attention and made him ask, "Why are you all crying to-day?"

His mother had loved him with one of those concentrated and fierce affections which destroy by very reason of over care. During his boyhood she had kept him tied to her apron-strings, never consenting for him to take part in the games of the other lads, lest he should hurt himself. Even when he was quite a youth, she always used to put him to bed, offering with him a series of innocent prayers, and sitting by his bedside with folded arms until he fell asleep, when she would silently leave his chamber on tip-toe. When he reached early manhood, she had nothing

to do but think of her son's career, for the late marquis had provided that he should follow one. Ricardo wanted to enter the artillery. How many tears the lad's resolute decision cost the mother! The first time that he went to Segovia, the good lady thought she should die: she made up her mind not to leave the house until her son returned, and she carried out her intention. When he came home to spend his vacation, she could not be enough at his side, caressing him and reading in his eyes his slightest caprices, so as to carry them out instantly. Two or three days before it was time for him to return, she would begin to sob and cry: she held him close to her bosom for long moments and made him promise a thousand times to write her every day, to cover himself up warm during his journey, and not to go out nights. The only thing which served to divert her for a short time was the preparation of his cadet's chest, with which she took so much pains that it lacked nothing, from the more usual articles of dress, down to a piece of court plaster and a package of lint in case he were wounded. Ricardo always avoided leave-taking by escaping on the sly.

Thanks to his genial, happy, and sympathetic nature, rather than by his application, the young Marqués de Peñalta finished his course. At college everybody loved him, students as well as professors. He was one of those frank and friendly young fellows with whom it is difficult to quarrel, and whom we all go to as a confidant worthy of sharing the secrets of our hearts in the bitter misfortunes of life. He was always found smiling and unreserved, bringing joy and confidence wherever he went, and rarely did a dispute arise between two cadets which he did not succeed in bringing to a friendly issue. In spite of his conciliatory temperament no one in college or

out of it questioned his courage, much less the remarkable prowess of his fists. More than once, in the frequent quarrels between the cadets and the peasants, which generally broke out in candle-light balls, he had floored three or four stout carls with as many blows, which attracted all the more attention from the crowd because there was nothing stout or athletic in his figure.

One day, while encamped in the park at Sevilla, the colonel called him into his tent and asked him, —

“Isn’t it a number of days since you have had a letter from your mother, Peñalta?”

Ricardo grew as pale as death.

“What is it, colonel? what is it?”

“Don’t be alarmed, child; ¹ I happened to learn that she wasn’t very well.”

Ricardo understood perfectly, and fell into the colonel’s arms, shedding a flood of tears. That night he took the train for the north.

The dismal night spent in that journey remained deeply impressed upon his mind. When the engine whistled, and his comrades, who had come to see him off, standing on the platform, waved their *adios*, he went and sat in a corner of the carriage, wrapped up in his cloak, feigning to sleep, in order better to abandon himself to his painful, gloomy thoughts. Oh, how painful and gloomy his thoughts! He imagined the guardian angel of his infancy, the mother of his heart, dying alone, without receiving her son’s last kiss, perhaps calling for him with yearning in the supreme moment of her agony. He remembered that when he had last left her, her health was so feeble, and the embrace which she gave him so longer than usual, and her kisses more precious than the

¹ *ariatur*.

poor woman had felt a presentiment that she should never see him again. In her wide, moist eyes he read a fervent silent prayer that he would abandon his profession and not leave her. But he, pleased with the vanities of society, and seduced by the voice of selfishness, had paid no heed to this prayer which the unhappy woman had not dared to formulate with her lips. He felt deeply angry with himself, and called himself the most insulting and humiliating names. From time to time he put his head out of the window and breathed the cool night air, to prevent the sobs from choking him. The vague, mysterious outline of the undulating landscape, wrapt in shadows, transformed his despair into grief, which gradually changed into a solemn melancholy like the gloomy clouds hovering above the still more gloomy earth. The silent majesty of inanimate nature calmed his agitation, but it made him think with cold chills of the perfect loneliness awaiting him. The tie that bound him to earth, and through which he felt that all human beings were his kin, was cut; now he had no one in the world whom he could call his own. The wind, stirred by the swift rush of the train, hummed in his ears and seemed to say to him, Alone! alone! The harsh racket of the wheels and engine violently excited his morbid state of mind, giving him a sensation almost of pain like that caused by the thoughts rushing through his brain. The noisy, metallic rhythm of the wheels likewise seemed to say, with still more relentless accent, Alone! alone! His sad face followed the far-off line of the horizon, and this came back to him in quivering, prophetic reflections, which barely sufficed to cleave asunder the network of shadows, gloom upon gloom. The light from the engine cast a reddish gleam, tingeing as with blood the ground and the trees lining the

track. Where there were no trees, the telegraph poles flew past him with bewildering rapidity like the happy hours of his youth. Above his head floated the huge black plume of the smoke, emitted by the smoke-stack of the engine, and this, as it disappeared in the atmosphere, in dying made a thousand strange and monstrous phantasms. These phantasms, as they fled away, rolling along just above the ground, seemed also to say mournfully, Alone! alone! Thereupon, being no longer able to endure the icy breath of the deserted landscape which penetrated his breast and parched his eyes, he shut the window and again returned to his corner and his tears.

In the car were four other people: an elderly señora and a young man of twenty or twenty-five, a girl of eighteen or twenty, and a little girl of five or six years old,—all of whom seemed to be her children. The señora went to sleep, though she kept opening her eyes to watch the child, who was incessantly running from one side to the other; the two young people were chatting quietly and confidentially together. The sight of this mother surrounded by her children and often looking at them lovingly still more deeply affected Ricardo. The gentle murmur of the brother and sister's conversation, repeatedly broken by repressed laughter, roused in his heart a keen, melancholy envy. The young girl was beautiful, with a noble, fascinating face. Ricardo, without realizing it, watched her all night, but she seemed to give no heed to him. When the guard of the station shouted "Cordoba! twenty minutes for refreshments!" all hastily got up and collected their things in preparation to leave the train. Then only the young lady gave him a long, sweet look, and as she went out, said with a sympathetic smile, "Good night, and a happy journey."

to you.”¹ There was no doubt that she had noticed his grief.

Ricardo felt deeply sorry to have them take their departure, as though some tide of affection bound him to that family, and he felt an inclination to say to the mamma, “Señora, I have just lost my mother; I am alone in the world, and I have no one to love me, and no one to love. Won’t you take me home with you as your son?” The car door closed with a bang, the bell rang, the hoarse shriek of the engine was heard, and the train sped on its way with its metallic clatter, which ceaselessly cried in the silence of the night, Alone! alone! alone!

A few relatives and friends were waiting for him, and they went with him silently to his home, where they left him after a few meaningless words. During the days that followed he received many visits of condolence from people who extolled his mother’s virtues and recommended great resignation. All called him Señor Marqués. Never did he suffer so much as at such times. The only person with whom he enjoyed talking was Don Mariano Elorza, who had been a good friend of his father’s, and whose house he visited very familiarly whenever he came to Nieva during his vacations. Don Mariano, who was cordial and friendly to everybody, could not well help showing himself doubly affectionate to him on account of the sorrowful situation in which he was placed. His house during the period which followed the marquesa’s death, was a place of refuge for our young friend, where his grief was consoled, and he found a little of that family life which he so greatly missed. On the other hand, it must be said that Ricardo had always felt toward Don Mariano’s eldest daughter a strong admiration and affec-

¹ *Buenas noches : que usted lleve feliz viaje!*

tion, which easily changed into love when age and passion offered, and frequency of intercourse stimulate and there was still greater reason for it since neither he nor she had ever been in love before. Long before they were formally engaged, the marriage of the young Marqués de Peñalta and the Señorita de Elorza used to be talked about in the city. It was a marriage desired and demanded by public opinion; for it must be remembered that the families of Peñalta and Elorza were the richest in town, and the public always considers it logical for wealth to seek wealth as rivers seek the sea. Accordingly, Ricardo and Maria were declared husband and wife not long after they were born, and the truth is, the gossips of the town would never have forgiven them if they had failed to carry out the edict passed by all the tertulias of Nieva. We know on good authority that the young people had no thought of any such intention, and that they had accepted the sovereign decree with the greatest meekness.

Returning now to where we left off, it is sufficient for us to remark that Ricardo very quickly reached the porch of the house of Elorza, which was large and gloomy. From the great solid door, darkened by time and use, hung a bronze knocker, with which he rapped. He was immediately admitted into a rather large court, with a fountain in the centre. A broad flight of stone steps with balustrade of the same material led from it. It was now somewhat the worse for wear, and needed repairs in many places. On the first landing this stairway divided into two arms, one of which led to the apartments of the owners, the other to those of the servants. The former ended in a wide corridor, or gallery, from which one looked through windows into the court. The whole house presented the same elegance as that of the old palaces, although it was

built at a comparatively modern period. It had the advantage over those old ancestral mansions, like the Marqués de Peñalta's, in that it had not been designed to minister so much to the vanity of its masters as to the suitable distribution of its rooms for the conveniences of daily life. It was not dark and gloomy, as those are apt to be; on the contrary, its whole interior spoke of joy, comfort, and elegance. It was, in fact, a great building, without being pretentious, and comfortable, without falling into the unpleasing vulgarity of many modern constructions. It held a conciliatory middle course between aristocratic and middle-class ideals, combining the proud lordliness of the one and the practical luxurious tendencies of the other.

The house in a certain way mirrored the position of its master and mistress. Both were children of the most important families not only in Nieva, but in the whole province in which the city is situated. The señora was sister of the Marqués de Revollar, who cut such a figure in Madrid a few years ago by his incredible dissipation and prodigality, and who afterwards, being totally ruined and driven away by his creditors, had taken refuge in the army of the Pretender, whom he served as minister and adviser. Don Mariano came from a family less ancient and glorious but far more opulent. His grandfather had made an immense fortune in Mexico during the final years of the last century, and with it he had become the most important landowner in Nieva, and had built the house of which we are speaking. Not only himself, but his son and his son's son, had succeeded in giving lustre to their millions by allying themselves with noble families.

Ricardo made his way through the various rooms of the house of Elorza with as much familiarity as though he had

been at home, without even taking off his hat. When he entered Doña Gertrudis's boudoir, this señora, assisted by two waiting-women, was taking a dish of broth. On seeing our hero, she placed the cup on the little stand in front of her, and pushing back her easy-chair, she exclaimed in a doleful tone, —

“ Ay, my dear,¹ you come at an evil hour.”

“ Why, what's the matter?”

“ I'm dying, Ricardo, I'm dying.”

“ Do you feel worse?”

“ Yes, my son, yes; I feel very ill; it is beyond the power of words to say how ill I feel. If I don't die to-day, I shall never die. I spent the whole night doing nothing but groan, and then — and then — that tiger of a Don Maximo has not come yet, though I have sent him two messages. May God forgive him! May God forgive him!”

Doña Gertrudis shut her eyes as though she were making ready to die without either temporal or spiritual comfort.

Ricardo, accustomed to these vaporings, remained a long time silent. At length he said in an indifferent tone, —

“ Did you know Enrique has succeeded in exchanging the jewelry, and the new set came yesterday all right?”

“ Indeed? thank God!”² replied Doña Gertrudis, opening her eyes; “ I certainly thought they wouldn't be willing to exchange it.”

“ Why not?”

“ Of course, because by selling the other they got rid of an old thing, which I don't know how they will ever sell now.”

“ Yes, but they would lose a customer who brings

¹ *querido*.

² *vaya gracias a Dios!*

them much gain. Don't you see, Enrique receives commissions from the whole province?"

"That's true enough; but don't you know that these traders are blinded by avarice? Uph! what wretched people. I tell you I can't bear to see tradesmen, Ricardo; I can't bear to see them, nor painters either!"

After expressing this unfavorable opinion of commerce, which, in the tribunal of her mind, she made co-extensive with all industry and to the mechanical arts in general, Doña Gertrudis again closed her eyes with a gesture of woe, and continued in this strain:—

"What I am sure of, my son, is that I am not going to see you married, and that you will be obliged to postpone the wedding on my account. I feel very ill, very ill; my heart tells me that I am going to die before the day of your marriage; and the truth is, that it would be better for me to die if I have got to suffer so much."

"Come, Doña Gertrudis, don't say such things. Who is going to die? You must surely get better gradually; you will be cured, and you will be well and plump so that it will be a delight to see you."

Instead of brightening up at these words, Doña Gertrudis grew angry:—

"That's nonsense, Ricardo; my illness is mortal, even if no one thinks so; my husband won't believe it, but very soon he will be convinced of it; I don't complain merely from habit, not at all. Ay! my dear, if you knew how I suffer, sitting in this easy-chair!"

It may be declared with certainty that from the day on which the priest had invoked the nuptial blessing on Doña Gertrudis, this noble señora had done nothing else but nurse her bodily woes and tribulations, dragging out a petty existence amid the strangest and obscurest ailments

that were ever known. Before the birth of her eldest daughter, Maria, she had suffered from hemorrhage and consumption. Then for several years afterwards, until her second daughter, Marta, was born, she complained of a terrible pain in her heart, so sharp and cruel that many times she had fainted away. The symptoms of this disease, as related by the patient, would fill any one with terror. Sometimes she thought she felt her heart handled and squeezed to the last degree; at others she thought that it was freezing, and then they had her shivering so that all the furs and flannels which they put on her breast had not the slightest effect, until by an abrupt transition she went into a heated oven, where she was roasted to such a degree that her hands in her paroxysms tore into fragments whatever garments she had on; again, finally, she was conscious of some animal gnawing it with his teeth, and of causing such exquisite agony that she could not refrain from shrieking. Don Maximo, the young graduate in medicine,¹ was absolutely nonplussed by such a pathological case, and at each visit he prophesied the immediate death of his patient unless the remedy for spasms which he prescribed should not instantly restore her safe and sound. As Doña Gertrudis did not make haste to die, nor did her extraordinary malady disappear, Don Maximo came to lose all faith in . . . He kept up his visits to the house, but always at regular hour, from which he rarely deviated even the Doña Gertrudis often sent for him by messengers, begging him to play the old farce over again in her sick-room. Don Maximo ended by having the greatest contempt his noble client's infirmities, and he went so far as characterize them publicly in the apothecary shop, with

¹ *licenciado*.

he was an assistant, as woman's *cajigalinas*. The exact meaning of the word *cajigalinas* was never known by the public or anybody else, nor can it be decided whether it was a private invention of Don Maximo's, or whether it was derived from some very ancient, even some dead, language which the licentiate had studied. The word, from its root, seems to be of Semitic origin, but I do not venture to settle this question off-hand; let the wise men decide. What is indubitable is that Don Maximo intended thereby to mean something that was insignificant, mean, or of little account; and this is enough for us to know what to make of the opinion of science in regard to Doña Gertrudis's ills.

After Marta's birth Doña Gertrudis's sufferings did not disappear, but they returned in a new form. Her heart was considerably calmed down, but instead, all the afflicted señora's muscles and tendons began to suffer contraction, causing powerful pains, preventing her for some months from using her limbs at all, and finally leaving her, though greatly improved, yet obliged when she walked to lean on her husband or one of her daughters. Don Maximo at the beginning of this new phase showed himself preoccupied and captious to the last degree; he studied with watchful eye all the symptoms and causes, prescribed remedies for spasms by the gallon, made use, in a word, of all the resources which science (that is, Don Maximo's science) offers for such emergencies, but without reaching any satisfactory results. At length the word *cajigalinas*, of Semitic origin, once more appeared on his lips, and from that time on he never entered the señora's room without a slight smile of incredulity hovering on his dark face.

Ricardo still remained a while at Doña Gertrudis's side,

and then he left her to scour the house in search of the girls. He found Marta in the kitchen busily engaged in making pastry for pies.

"Where's Maria, *ma petite ménagère*?"

"She's in her room, dressing; she'll be down soon."

"If I disturb you in your work, I'm going; if not, I'll stay."

"You don't disturb me, if you'll only stand out of the light a little—there, that'll do!"

"All right! I'll stay and learn how to make—what is it you're making?"

"Pork-pies."

"Well, then, to make pork pies."

The girl raised her head, smiling at her future brother-in-law, and then she resumed her work. She was standing at a low table which, judging from its shining surface, was meant for the operation now going on. She wore an enormous white apron like the kitchen girls, and on her head a cap no less white. Her great bright black eyes made a more brilliant contrast with this costume, and so did her jetty hair. She had rolled up the sleeves of her dress and bared a pair of soft arms, which were more fully rounded than might have been expected at her age. Her arms bespoke a woman in full possession of all the piquant attractions, all the graceful curves of her sex; they were the smooth white arms of a Flemish maiden, but solid and well-knit like those of a working-girl; they might have served as a model for a sculptor, or to keep room in daintiest order. With them she rolled from side to side, on the top of the table, a great lump of yellowish dough, manipulating it and doubling it over and over constantly without thought of rest. The dough spread softly over the table because of the lard which shorten

it, making a slight noise like the rustle of silk. A few maid-servants were bustling about the kitchen, attending to their duties. Ricardo watched the operation for an instant without speaking, but before long he exclaimed with signs of astonishment, —

“What an extraordinary thing! what an extraordinary thing!”

The maid-servants turned their heads around. Marta likewise looked up.

“Why, what’s the matter?”

“But child, where did you get those plump arms of yours?”

The young girl blushed, and half-laughing, half-vexed, raised her hand and pulled down her sleeve a little.

“Come! will you begin now? See here, I did not tell you that you might stay to behave like this.”

“Then I deserve the punishment of staying, though you should demand the opposite.”

“Well, do what you please, but let me work in peace.”

“I will let you work, but I must say it never entered into my calculations that the Señorita Marta had such arms. I knew that she was pretty, comely, round, and solid — but how could I suspect such a thing? . . . Come now, I tell you that no one would believe it without the evidence of his eyes.”

The servants laughed. Marta went on industriously kneading her dough, making a gesture of resignation as one who has made up her mind to endure a jest to the end. Ricardo kept on: —

“And that, too, though I have heard Maria speak of them — but vaguely . . . Her information wasn’t definite. **The best way** in these matters, if one wants to know about

a thing, is to see for himself . . . Look here, lassie,¹ supposing one were to quarrel with you, I wouldn't answer for the consequences! . . . And the beauty of it is, that their strength doesn't injure their elegance; they are muscular but well-shaped; . . . they taper gracefully down to the wrist, which is slender and dainty. The truth is, that all things considered, a girl only fourteen has no right to have such arms as those!"

Marta suspended her work and burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"What a plague you are, child! there's no resisting you!"

Then her face once more resumed the placid, grave expression which characterized it, and she resumed her work, plunging again and again her firm, rosy fists into the pliant dough. The paste kept taking different forms under the steady pressure of the girl's small but strong hands. Sometimes it made a thick, short roll or cylinder, which, little by little, as it was worked over the table, kept growing longer and slenderer; again, it assumed the fashion of a great ball, the roundness of which Marta brought carefully to greater and greater perfection, until she suddenly fell upon it with both hands and flattened it out; at other times it presented the appearance of a thin sheet taking up half of the surface of the table, and which kept spreading more and more, until she began to double it over with repeated folds as one does with a garment; again, she built it up like a pyramid on the slopes of which the graceful little baker bestowed soft pats, as though she were caressing it, but not hesitating fiercely to tear it in pieces in order to give it immediately some new and capricious figure. When it seemed to her

¹ *chica*.

that the paste was sufficiently kneaded, she cut it into a number of lumps with a knife, and taking a wooden rolling-pin, she began to shape them with great care. Ricardo asked timidly, —

“Will you let me help you, Martita?”

“You don’t know how.”

“You can tell me what to do, and under your direction it will go first-rate.”

“Now, you flatter me! All right, I’m willing; but you must wash your hands first.”

Nothing was left for Ricardo but to go and wash his hands.

“That’s good. Now take this rolling-pin and flatten out this lump of dough till you make it into a thin, round piece.”

The new baker applied himself to his work with ardor; with too great ardor, for the dough was sometimes rolled so extremely thin that it was nothing but holes. The servants looked on with broad smiles of admiration, while Marta kept gravely intent upon her task. In the kitchen the atmosphere was suffocating, as it was heated by the red-hot iron covers of the oven, and impregnated with the heavy odors of cooking viands, which disturb and revolt the stomach when it is surfeited, but excite and stimulate it when it is empty.

Ricardo could not keep his tongue still a single instant. While he was passing the rolling-pin over the dough with greater circumspection than if he had been engaged in preparing a magic philter, he did not cease to ask questions and make remarks of all sorts to Marta, principally in regard to the pie which they had undertaken to make: “How many eggs did you put in the flour? How much lard? Who taught you to make pies? How long does it

have to stay in the oven?" etc., etc. Marta gave laconic answers, and did not lift her face to all his questions, allowing a vague smile of condescending superiority to hover over her lips.

"Aye! Marta, what would Manolito Lopez say, if he were to see us at this moment?"

"What has he to say? It's nothing to him," replied the girl, slightly blushing.

"Wouldn't he be jealous, to see us so near together?"

"Why?"

"Oh, I know! I know he's in love with you, according to what they say."

"Why do you wish to plague me so?"

"Lassie, everybody is talking about it; it's no invention of mine."

"Very well; then keep it up, as you say."

"I will, so far as I see it."

"Come, don't be foolish!"

Marta's tone in saying this showed some signs of vexation. It was evident that she did not quite relish the joke. Ricardo's ground for making it was slight enough, as is almost always the case with children; but it was true to a certain degree. Little urchins of fourteen or fifteen, called, in popular language, *pípiolos*, run after the small girls of the same age; and they establish, for the most part tacitly, certain relations with them which resemble or imitate the love affairs of their seniors. It is said, for example, among them that Fulanito¹ is Fulanita's sweetheart, without any reason why; and Fulanito, merely from this fact, without Fulanita meaning much to him, goes to wait for her, with other friends, at the school-

¹ *Fulanito*, diminutive of *Fulano*, such an one; hence, little master, little miss.

room door, and follows her home, greatly to the vexation of the tending maid ; at the little parties which are given from house to house he takes her out to dance more frequently than the others. If he be somewhat daring, he is apt to offer her candy in cones of gilt paper ; and he passes in front of her house several times a day, when he begins to wear new clothes or a new hat ; he manages, when he walks behind her, to speak loud and distinctly for her to hear, and plumes himself on his clever talk ; and he is quick to roll up his sleeves for the most insignificant thing, so as to exhibit in her presence a boldness and courage which he would not have if she were absent ; he spends the pennies which he possesses on pomade or scented oil, and comes to mass when she is present, his hair brushed and as shiny as a cat just out of the water ; in the afternoon, when his heart is sore because she does not take any notice of him, he follows behind her with some of his friends, indulging in naughty words and stupid laughter ; and sometimes, coming close up to her, he pulls her by the hair-ribbon, until, with these and other trickeries, he succeeds in making her cry.

Fulanita's conduct is generally of a piece. In reality she doesn't care a fig for Fulanito ; but as they say he is her sweetheart, she does all she can to carry out the idea, and so she keeps turning her head to look for him when she comes out of school ; at the German she selects him as a partner more times than the others ; she hurries to the window when he passes, and blushes when they joke her about him, But these pseudo-affections are almost never lasting, and rarely become real. They begin silently, they live their day silently, and silently they pass away when the girl puts on long dresses. The reason for such fickleness is very obvious. Fulanito has as yet attained

the age, not of love affairs, but of the gymnasium, *suspen-sos*, and sage cigars. Fulanita is already far more perfectly developed as far as the life of the heart is concerned, and in her inmost soul she has a profound scorn for Fulanito, who does not know how to descant on affinity and love, is incapable of kissing a fan fallen from the hand, and hasn't a sign of a mustache.

Of this sort, though with slight variations, was our Marta's friendship with Manolito Lopez. To the general causes which tend to wither and nip in the bud such predilections must be added in this case the very slight similarity of their characters. Manolito, though he had an expressive and even handsome face, was mischievous, obstreperous, quarrelsome, and saucy; one good quality was observable in him: he was not inclined to be spiteful. Marta was placid, taciturn, and reserved; the fault which they found with her at home was that she was somewhat obstinate. It was not possible, therefore, to have a more complete antithesis. If this had not been so, Marta would have come to love Manolito, for her temperament was opposed to change not only in the furniture of her room, but in the sentiments of her heart.

When they had finished moulding various thin covers of pastry, Marta went to work to put some of them on top of others in copper baking-dishes, which made the bottom of the pie. Then one of the maids put on the pork, neatly trimmed and cut into small bits, and, well seasoned with spices, exhaled a stimulating and zing odor, which made the mouth water. When the bits were laid on the bottom crust in the most proper order, the girl went to spreading new covers over which she laid over the pork. Ricardo no longer liked her; he was evidently tired of it. But when it came

making the ornaments for the top, he once more hastened to offer his services, and he took great delight in designing in the dough a thousand kinds of mosaics, arabesques, and figures of every species that was ever seen. Marta put an end to such dilettante labors by taking the pastry from his hand, for he was never done. When the pie was made, the girl herself put it in the oven, and following a pious custom traditional in that part of the country; she made the sign of the cross over it, and repeated a *Pater Noster* so as to obtain a happy result.

"Do you know one thing, Martita?"

"What is that?"

"That kitchen odors and the labor on these pies have given me an abnormal appetite!"

"Really?"

"It's the honest truth!"

"Then see here; something to eat will cure it. Come with me."

And she drew him to the dining-room near by and seated him at the table. Then she took out of a side-board a napkin, bread, wine, a plate of cold turkey, and a jar of preserves, and put them down one after the other with the carefulness and system which characterized all her movements.

"Eat, Señor Marqués, eat."

To call Ricardo "*Señor Marqués*" was one of the most audacious jests which Marta allowed herself to indulge in toward her future brother. It was not in accordance with her nature to make jokes and epigrams about any one. Those that occasionally came from her lips were meant to disguise a tenderness which her reserved nature prevented her from showing openly to any one, even to her own sister.

Ricardo proceeded to despatch a slice of turkey with all solemnity, occasionally washing it down with draughts of Valdepeñas, while the girl, smiling and happy, stood enjoying her friend's voracious appetite, and looking out to fill his glass with wine and change his plate when there was need.

"You are a fine woman, Martita," said Ricardo, with his mouth full. "You're worth your weight in gold, and certainly you would not weigh a little, judging by the signs which I won't mention for fear you would call me a bore. When I see Manolito Lopez, I shall tell him not to think of any other woman if he wants to get fat and plump; and that's what he very much needs. If you take such good care of me, what care you would take of him! — That's enough, that's enough, Martita! don't give me so much preserve. One would think that you wanted to give me dyspepsia here, on the sly. — This turkey is excellent; it deserves the honors which I have done it; — a little more wine, please! —"

Marta poured out the wine, and looked at him out of her great, calm eyes, in which gleamed an evanescent smile of comfortable satisfaction. It seemed as if it were she who was feasting.

"See here, lassie¹! do me the favor to eat something, too, because it grieves me to see you so abstemious. should think you were being punished."

The girl was not hungry, and she refused to take a plate which Ricardo offered her. However, she cut a small piece of bread, and began to devour it solemnly with her little white teeth.

"I prophesy that it won't be long before you disp of this saucer of preserve, Martita. The thing is

¹ *mira, chica.*

begin. The worst of it is, it's now twelve o'clock, and at dinner-time I shan't have any appetite. — Yet I don't know how far that's certain, for my stomach is a good one! — Martita, don't be foolish, but eat this preserve, which you will find appetizing."

While Ricardo was bringing his task of feasting and chattering to an end, Genoveva came into the dining-room, saying, —

The Señorita Maria has a little headache and is resting in her room."

"I'll go to her," cried Marta, hurrying away.

"And I bring you this message from her, señorito," added the maid, handing him a note.

But seeing that the young man was about to break the seal, she said, —

"The señorita wanted you not to read it till after you had left the house."

"Very good," muttered Ricardo, somewhat disturbed.

And taking his hat, and without saying farewell to any one, he hurried home devoured by impatience, and tearing open the envelope with trembling hand, he read the following letter : —

"MI QUERIDÍSIMO RICARDO, —

"For some time I have been anxious to tell you a thought that has filled my mind, but I have not had the courage. I know your nature well: you are extremely impetuous, and thus many times, instead of reflecting on my words and trying to understand their meaning, you would flare up like gunpowder, spoil everything, and frighten me terribly, as on the evening when we celebrated mamma's fête-day. Accordingly, after much vacillation, I have decided to tell you by letter and not by word of mouth.

"The thought that disturbs me of late is to ask you to post-

pone our wedding still a little longer. Don't get angry, Ricardo mio, and read on calmly. I am sure that the first thought that will occur to your mind is that I don't love you. How mistaken you would be to think such a thing! If you could read in my soul, you would see that love holds my conscience in its sway, and this I deplore bitterly. But that is not the question now.

"Are you sure, Ricardo, that you and I are properly trained to enter upon a state which entails so many and such serious responsibilities? Have you thought well of what the sacrament of marriage means? Is there not in our hearts rather an unreflecting inclination, mixed, perhaps, with carnal impulses, than a serious desire to undertake an austere, religious life, becoming in a Christian family, educating our children in the fear of God and in the practice of virtue? If you reflect a little on how frivolous hitherto our love has been, and on the sins which we are constantly committing, you cannot but agree with me that two young people, so wanting in gravity and genuine virtue, are not authorized by God to bring up and direct a family. I should feel a great smiting of the conscience if I were married now (and you ought to feel the same), and I believe that God could not bless or make our union happy. If it is to be blessed, we must make ourselves worthy of celebrating it, by leaving forever behind us our frivolous, worldly manner of loving, for another, more lofty and spiritual, by refraining absolutely from certain earthly manifestations to which we are impelled by our great love, and by making preparations for it, during a few months at least, by a virtuous and devout life, by performing a few sacrifices and works of charity, and by constantly imploring God to illumine our minds, and give us power to fulfil the duties imposed upon us by the new state.

"There is an example in history which ought to encourage us greatly in doing what I propose. The beloved Saint Isabel of Hungary had been betrothed from early youth to the Duke Luis of Thuringen, but the nuptials were not celebrated until both reached the proper age. After the betrothal was celebrated, Isabel and Luis did not separate, but lived in the same

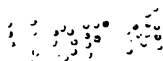
palace, as though they had been brother and sister, until, by the will of God, they became husband and wife. The pious sentiments of the lovers, together with the austere education which was given them, made their affection always pure and upright, founding the unchangeable union of their hearts, not on the ephemeral sentiments of a purely human attraction, but on a common faith and the stern observance of all the virtues inculcated by this faith. Until they were united by the indissoluble bond of matrimony, they always called each other brother and sister; and even after they were married, they frequently used to apply this sweet name to each other.

"I confess, Ricardo, that the spectacle of those noble and holy young people has an unspeakable attraction for me. Love sanctified in such a way is a thousand times more beautiful, and bestows upon the heart purer and loftier pleasures. Why should we not follow, as far as possible, the steps of that illustrious husband and wife, the pattern of abnegation and tenderness, as well as of purity and fidelity? Why should you not imitate, my beloved Ricardo, the stern virtue of the young Duke of Thuringen, the nobleness and dignity of all his actions, the innocence and modesty of his soul, never found guilty of falsehood, — virtues which in no respect were opposed to the valor and boldness of which he always gave eminent proofs? For my part, I promise you to imitate, according to the measure of my feeble strength, the tenderness, the obedience, and the faithfulness of his saintly spouse Isabel, living subject to the law of God, within the affection which I profess for you.

"This is what I propose to you, and desire to do. Don't get angry, for God's sake, dear Ricardo; reflect over what I have just said, and you will see how right I am. Doubt not that I love you much, much, — I, who am, for the time being,

"Your sister,

"MARIA."



CHAPTER V.

THE ROAD TO PERFECTION.

THE letter which we have just read led to a very important crisis in the lives of our lovers. Ricardo at first was furious, and wrote a long answer to his betrothed, announcing the end of their acquaintance, but he did not send it. Then he held a consultation with her in which he overwhelmed her with recriminations and insults, saying that all she had written in her letter was nothing but a tissue of follies and absurdities, manufactured on purpose to hide her treachery; that she might have dismissed him in some way not so grotesque; that although he had no claim upon her love, at least he might and ought to demand the frankness and loyalty which he had always shown; that for a long time back he had noticed her coldness and indifference, but he could never have believed that she would make use of a pretext so ridiculous and so absurd for breaking the tie that united them, etc., etc. Maria received this storm of contumely with great humility, assuring him with gentle words of persuasion, when he left her a moment's chance to speak, that she still loved him with all her soul; that he might put her love to the test as often as he pleased, since she was ready to make whatever sacrifice he demanded, except what went against her conscience; that his suspicions of her untruth and treachery cut her to the heart, but she forgave him because she was aware of his excited state of mind; that she likewise felt it keenly that he should

call the motives of her resolution grotesque and ridiculous when she found them so worthy; and, in fine, that she begged him to calm himself.

After the young marquis had thoroughly vented his ill feeling without result, he began to get off of his high horse and try the effect of skilful reasoning, and then he changed to entreaties, but without any better results. He employed all the device of genius and all the tender and expressive words dictated by his honorable heart, in order to convince her that neither of them was fortunately under the necessity of mourning for their sins like two criminals; since if they were not better than the average of humanity, they were at least as good; and as for their skill and judgment in governing themselves and their children in matrimony, he believed that they were no less fitted than the rest, and that in the end they would come out as well as other people. All was useless. The young woman met argument with argument, and her lover's prayers, sprinkled with endearments, with a firm and obstinate silence. Ricardo, in a state of tribulation which Father Rivadeneira does not take account of as a matter of merit in his treatise, went straight to Don Mariano, whom he loved like a father, to tell him the state of things, and ask his aid and advice. The latter was highly surprised and disturbed when he read his daughter's letter. He read it over many times as though he could not get the key of it, and at each new reading he found it more obscure and inexplicable. Finally he handed it back with a gesture of dismay, signifying that his daughter must have lost her wits, for he could not understand any such nonsense.

In point of fact, Don Mariano was a sincere believer, fulfilling scrupulously the moral precepts of religion, but

he looked upon the things which relate to worship some coolness, if not with scorn. He had never do the religious truths learned in his childhood, but he never made much account of masses and sermons, never went to church more than was strictly necessary. He could make a distinction, when these subjects came up for discussion, between religion and the priest, confessing for these latter a decided Voltairian hostility, which came from inheritance, according to Doña Gertrudis, since his grandfather, the Mexican, had kept up friendly relations and a voluminous correspondence with a member of the French Convention. He had an insuperable faith in modern progress, and he made use of the inventions constantly realized by human industry, in order to combat and crush the fragile arguments of his constant enemies, the partisans of tradition, among whom not the least obstinate and vexatious was his wife. If, for example, a telegram from any relation or friend was received in the house, Don Mariano, after reading it, would hold it out to his wife with a triumphal smile, saying, —

“Here, this miserable modern invention brings us word that your brother has reached Paris safely.”

He delighted in making humorous conjectures on the fright that would seize our forefathers if they were suddenly put in a railroad car, or were told that they could communicate whenever they pleased with a friend residing in Havana. Whenever he found in the papers a notice of any wonderful invention, the audacious man hastened to read it to his wife, and he kept the paper so as to read it also to the many conservatives who frequented the house. If the invention was not costly, he had the machine sent him, although it was not of the slightest use to him; and so he kept the house stored with curi-

manufactures, almost all of them covered with dust, and out of order by want of use, — ice-making machines, churns, cider-mills, organs, etc., parlor telegraphs, stereopticons, pans for cooking meat with a piece of paper, life-preservers, canes with chairs and guns, waterproof umbrellas with tent arrangement, and an endless array of strange articles. When the machine did not work, Don Mariano was disgusted and felt humiliated, and fearing lest the glory of modern science should be diminished in consequence, he did not speak of the apparatus before his señora; or if he were obliged to do so, he escaped the difficulty on a tangent, as he used to say, by always attributing the unfortunate result to his own stupidity, and not the quality of the machine. This eager love which he professed for the incredible advances of the present age, and the struggle which he waged both in his house and out of it with the friends of tradition, occasionally impelled him to employ forbidden weapons, as for example to exaggerate the power of modern industry, giving fictitious accounts of the beginning of stupendous new enterprises which had never as yet entered into the mind of man. One day he startled his friends by assuring them that it was seriously intended to establish a floating bridge between Europe and America, over which one could travel by rail to the New World; another time he astonished them by declaring that a telescope was in construction, which would bring the moon within half a league of the earth, so that we could discover whether that satellite had inhabitants. Again, he filled them with wonder by informing them that in the United States a whole cathedral had been moved at once from one town to another by means of hydraulic pressure. In regard to mechanical advances, Don Mariano had more imagination

than Shakespeare. National politics engaged his attention little in comparison with the incessant and sublime progress realized by humanity, and he detested the exaggerations which in his view tended to hinder it. His affiliations were with the liberal conservative party.

With these peculiarities, it is easy to imagine the effect made upon him by his daughter's letter. He looked upon it as one of those many extravagant hobbies which she had passed through in her life, and he solemnly promised Ricardo to make her desist from such folly. But after he had called her to his room and spent about two hours closeted with her, he began to suspect that the thing was not so easy as it appeared at first sight. Neither by turning her austere plan into ridicule by his jests, nor by showing that he was annoyed, nor by descending to entreaties, was our worthy caballero able to accomplish anything. Maria met these attacks like her lover's, with a humble but resolute attitude impossible to overcome. No other way was left them but to resign themselves, and this they both did perforce with the secret hope that the girl would very soon change of her own accord when once her caprice was satisfied. Accordingly the wedding was indefinitely postponed, and poor Ricardo began to play his part as Duke of Thuringen almost as ill as a Spanish actor. From that time forth his interviews with Maria became less frequent and familiar. The girl seemed to shun him and to avoid opportunities of talking confidentially with him as she used. Ricardo eagerly sought them, sometimes employing them in bitter expostulations, at others in softly whispering a thousand passionate phrases. She always appeared sweet and affectionate, but endeavored to turn the conversation to serious subjects. Ricardo still caressed her whenever he

had an opportunity, but he no longer obtained from her the usual reciprocation in spite of the incredible efforts which he made to obtain it. And not only he did not obtain this grace, but little by little the girl came to avoid his familiarities by always talking with him in the presence of others. One day when he found her alone in the dining-room, he said to himself with inward delight, "She is mine." And creeping up behind her carefully, he gave her a ringing kiss on her neck. Maria sprang suddenly from her chair and said, with a certain sweetness not free from severity, —


"Ricardo, don't do that again!"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like it."

"How long since?"

"I never did; don't be foolish." She said these words with asperity, and another unpleasant stage in Ricardo's love was signalized. Almost absolutely ceased those happy moments of fond raptures, sweet and delicious as the pleasures of the angels in which the poesy of spirit and matter is indistinguishable, the prospect of which kindles and stirs the deepest roots of our being, and their remembrance throws over all our lives, even for the most prosaic of men, a vague and poetical melancholy helping us to endure the rebuffs of existence and to contemplate without envy the felicity of others. The most that the young marquis obtained grudgingly from his sweetheart was the permission to give her a brotherly kiss on the forehead from time to time. And there is no need of telling my experienced readers, for they must be able to imagine it, that with this enforced fast the young man's love far from growing less, increased and became violent beyond all power of words.



Maria was able fully to devote herself to the life of perfection toward which she had felt such vehement aspiration. The hours of the day seemed to her too few for her prayers, both at church and at home, and for the repentance of her sins. She attended the sacraments more and more, and she was present and assisted with her sympathy and money in all the religious solemnities which were celebrated in the town. The time left free from her prayers she spent in reading books of devotion, which, in a short time, formed a library almost as numerous as her novels. The lives of the saints pleased her above all, and she soon devoured a multitude of them, paying most attention, as was logical, to the lives of those who reached the greatest glory and brought the greatest splendor to the Church, — the life of Saint Teresa, that of Saint Catalina of Sienna, of Saint Gertrudis, of Saint Isabel, Saint Eulalia, Saint Monica, and many others who, without having been canonized, were celebrated for their piety and for the spiritual graces which God bestowed upon them, like the holy Margarita of Alacoque, Mademoiselle de Melun, and others. These works made a very profound impression on our young lady's ardent and enthusiastic mind, driving her farther and farther along the road to perfection. The incredible and invincible powers of those heroic souls, who, through love and charity, succeeded in lifting themselves to heaven and in enjoying through anticipation, while still on earth, the delights reserved for the blessed, filled her with devout and fervent admiration. She felt an ecstasy over the most insignificant incidents in the lives of the saints, who God often showed them that He held them as His chosen ones, and would not let the world entice them away, as for example, the scene of the miraculous toad which Saint

Teresa saw talking in the garden with a caballero toward whom she felt a drawing; the sudden death of Buenaventura, Saint Catalina's sister, who was leading that holy woman along the worldly path of bodily adornments and pleasures; and many others which filled the books aforesaid. Maria regarded these notable heroines of religion with the same emotion and astonishment as one regards the phenomena and marvels of nature. A long time passed before she dared to lift her eyes toward them in the way of imitation; she contented herself with beseeching them, through interminable prayers, to intercede with God to pardon her sins. She bought the finest effigies that she found and, when she had caused them to be richly framed, she hung them up on the walls of her room. To do this she had to take down Malec-Kadel and many other warriors of the Middle Ages which had invaded them. She was especially carried away by the scenes of their infancy, and by the first steps which these blessed women had taken along the road to perfection; but when she reached that part of their lives which marked the apogee of their glory on earth, when God, overcome by their steadfast love, their fidelity, and the wonderful penances imposed upon themselves, began to grant them favors and spiritual gifts by means of ecstasies and visions, she remained somewhat disturbed and even cast down. She did not as yet comprehend the mystic delight of direct communication through the senses between the soul and God, and she confessed with great compunction that if one of these miraculous visions were to be vouchsafed her, she should feel much greater fear than pleasure.

Nevertheless, before long, the desire to imitate them sprang up in her heart. It is always a short step from

THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA.

ration to imitation. She began where it was proper that is, by imitating their humility. Hitherto she had been modest, but not to such a degree as not to enjoy being flattered and applauded; but from this time forth she not only carefully avoided all praise, but she repelled those who offered it, and even tried to hide her talents so as to give her friends no chance to praise her. She began to talk as little as possible with friends or members of the family, and to do on the instant whatever they asked her to, lamenting in her heart that they did not give her harsh commands. She managed to have the servants help her at table after all the rest, and always give her stale bread instead of fresh. To conquer the natural impulses of selfishness she showed those who had offended her more affability than others, and any one had only to offend her pride more or less for her immediately to overwhelm them with attentions, as though she owed them gratitude. On the other hand, to those who, as she knew, loved and admired her, she took delight in seeming peevish, so that they might not think her better than she really was.

Having started out on this pious path, which has been travelled by all the saints for the glory of God and of the human race, since the virtue of humility raises man above his own nature, conquering the passions deepest rooted in the human heart, and, of all virtues is the one that best proves the power of the spirit, and inspires respect even in the most unbelieving of men; having started out, I say on this pious path, and being aided by vivid imagination, she performed a number of strange deeds, wellnigh incomprehensible to those whose attention is turned to the world and not to religious things, deeds which the illustrious biographers of Saint Isabel

calls *secret and holy fancies*,¹ serving as the mystic steps whereby the soul mounts to perfection and communicates with God. One day, for example, it came into her mind to eat humbly with the servants as though she were one of them. In order to do this, when dinner-time came, she pretended to have a headache, and kept in her chamber; but when the family were gathered in the dining-room, she softly ran down stairs to the kitchen, and there she stayed all through the dinner-hour, helping herself to the remains of the food, to the surprise and admiration of the servants. Another day, when it seemed to her that she had not answered her father with sufficient respect, she suddenly presented herself in his office, fell on her knees, and begged his pardon. Don Mariano lifted her from the floor, with startled eyes: —

“But, my daughter, suppose you have not offended me, or committed any fault? And even if you had, there is no need of going to these extremes. What nonsense! Come, give me a kiss, and go and sew with your sister, and don’t frighten me again with such absurdities!”

Maria did not meet with the contrarieties in the bosom of her family that she would have liked, in the way of test. Her father and sister, though they did not encourage her in her devotions, said nothing to oppose her; and each day they showed her more and more affection, which was the natural consequence of the growing sweetness and gentleness of her character. Her mother adored her with foolish frenzy, blindly applauded all her acts of piety, and never wearied of praising to the skies the virtue and talent of her first-born. The servants, and particularly Genoveva, likewise joined their voices in a chorus of flatteries, spreading all over town the fame of her virtues,

¹ *secretus y santas fantasmas.*

and crowning her with a halo of respect and sanctity. As far as such things influenced her salvation, our maiden would have preferred a cruel, tyrannical father, who laid harsh commands upon her, or a disagreeable mother or an envious sister, who would not let her live in peace, since, according to the biographies which she read, no saint had been free from suffering persecutions in her own family. She grieved inwardly at the ease and comfort which she enjoyed at home, and she thought that she suffered nothing for the God who had redeemed us with His blood. She would have liked it had a calumny been breathed about her, such as Palmerina caused Saint Catalina of Sienna to suffer, so that she might be scorned and maltreated; but no one in the house or out of it dreamed of doing such a thing.

To compensate for this absence of persecutions, she mortified her flesh with fasting and penances, always performing those which were most unpleasant to her. Some dish on the table was distasteful to her; then she imposed upon herself the penance of eating it, leaving others, of which she was extremely fond, untouched. She went so far as to put aloes in some, in imitation of what was done by Saint Nicolas of Tolentino. On Fridays she fasted rigorously on bread and water, performing miracles of shrewdness to prevent her father from discovering it; for she felt certain that if he knew it, he would not give his consent.

She always wore a locket around her neck, containing the picture of her betrothed. One day, when he had succeeded in having a moment's conversation alone with her, she said to him, —

“Listen, Ricardo; if you would not be vexed, I would tell you something.”

"What is it?" hastily asked the young man, with the sudden alarm of one who is always afraid of some misfortune.

"I see that I am going to offend you—but I will tell you. I have taken your picture out of the locket."

Ricardo's face expressed amazement.

"And the worst is, that I have put another in its place."

The expression of amazement changed into one of such pain, that Maria, on looking in his contracted and grief-stricken face, could not refrain from breaking out into a fresh, ringing peal of merry laughter, such as in former times used to ripple from her lips all the time, and which little by little had decreased, as though the fire of light and joy from which they came had died down.

"Good Heavens! what a long face!—Wait! Now I'll show your substitute, so as to make you suffer more."

And taking the locket from her neck she showed it to him. It held the effigy of Jesus crowned with thorns. Ricardo, half satisfied and half vexed, answered with a smile.

"Now kiss it!"

The young man obeyed instantly, placing his lips on the picture of the Lord, and at the same time touching the rosy fingers which held it out to him. Maria withdrew them and ran away.

Equally as she schooled herself in humility, so she gave much heed to that other virtue, which is, so to speak, the foundation of our religion and the chief crown of glory that the creature can offer to God,—the virtue of charity. Our maiden's excellent heart and the example of her parents were sufficient reason for her to alleviate as far as possible the miseries of her neighbors, but beside this there was now the continual inducement in the in-

credible power of organization and charity shown by saints, whom she had loved with the greatest fervor, particularly the sisters of Thuringen, who bore the name of Mother of the Poor. And so she visited with compassion on all the wretched, and lost no opportunity to supply their need with lavish hand. All the money which her father gave her she employed in almsgiving. In company with Genoveva she visited the houses of many poor people, whom she assisted not only with money but also with words of council, on the ground that man lives not by bread alone. In order to school herself in humility in the same way that was practised by Margaret, the sainted queen of Scotland, she had some beggars come secretly to her room, and washed their feet with the greatest scrupulousness. Each one of these pious deeds filled her with a holy inward joy such as she had never before experienced. She took up the habit of never allowing any poor person who asked alms to go without receiving them, since in addition to the dictates of her heart she remembered the multitude of cases in which our Lord or the Virgin had appeared to many saints in the disguise of beggars. Her desire, mixed with fear, that something of this sort might happen in her case, impelled her to scrutinize with considerable care the faces of the poor. But as her own resources did not suffice for her attention to such numerous charities, she had to scheme in order to obtain money from her father, using a thousand innocent devices: one day asking it for a parasol, another for a clock, another for a case of scissors, etc., etc. She went to such extremes, however, that Don Mariano began to suspect the truth, and put a limit to his munificence. His daughter had impoverished him with the greatest innocence.

Carried away by her ardent charity, she likewise wanted to put herself to the test by caring for the sick ; above all, for those who were suffering from disgusting diseases. She heard that a woman near her house was suffering from a sore breast, and she made the resolution to go every morning and dress it, and this she instantly put into practice ; but at the very first visit, wishing to add what she had read in the history of Saint Catalina, that is, wishing to kiss the sick woman's sore, the loathing and horror which overcame her were so great that she grew faint, became very ill, and Genoveva had to take her in her arms and carry her home.

The poor girl attributed her misfortune not to the feebleness of her stomach, but to her lack of virtue, and she applied herself with increased anxiety to better her life.

Genoveva took part in all these exercises of piety, but rather as her companion and confidential friend than as her maid. She aided her, oftentimes without understanding where she was going to stop, absolutely persuaded that she could not go on the wrong track, for she had blind faith in her señorita's discretion. It was not so much affection which she felt for her, as a species of idolatry in which was mingled admiration for her beauty, respect for her talent, and pride in having seen the birth of a prodigy in the creation of which she had had a share. Maria was unable to arouse in her the mystic enthusiasm which possessed herself, for Genoveva was not of an inflammable nature, and a supine ignorance shielded her from all sorts of enthusiasms ; but she succeeded through her acts and religious discourses in awakening in her the fanaticism which is always dormant in the depths of vulgar, ignorant souls.

One night after Maria had retired from the family circle, and Genoveva had left the kitchen, they found themselves in the boudoir in the tower. Maria was reading by the light of her polished iron lamp,¹ while Genoveva was seated in another chair in front of her, engaged in knitting stockings. They often spent an hour or two in this way before going to bed, since the señorita was accustomed of old to read till the small hours of the night.

She did not seem so absorbed in her reading as usual. She often laid the book on the table and remained a long while thoughtful, with her cheek resting in her hand: then she took it up again, only to lay it down very hastily; she was nervous, judging by the creaking of the chair. From time to time she fastened a long gaze on Genoveva in which gleamed a timid, restless desire and a sort of inner struggle with some thought preoccupying her. Genoveva, on the other hand, was more than ever absorbed in her stocking, doubtless mixing with her stitches a crowd of more or less philosophical considerations which obliged her, from time to time, to lean forward towards her hands just as if she were asleep.

At last the señorita decided to break the silence.

"Genoveva, don't you want to read this passage from the life of Saint Isabel?" she asked, handing her the book.

"With all my heart,² señorita."

"Look here where it says: 'When her husband.'"

Genoveva began to read the paragraph to herself, but very soon Maria interrupted her, saying,—

"No, no; read it aloud!"

Whereupon she obeyed, reading what follows:—

¹ *quinque*.

² *con mil amores*, literally, with a thousand loves.

“When her husband was absent, she spent the whole night watching with Jesus, the spouse of her soul. But the penances which the innocent young princess imposed upon herself were not limited to this alone. Under her most splendid garments she always wore a haircloth cilicium next her flesh. Every Friday she let herself be severely whipped in secret in memory of the dolorous passion of our Lord, and daily during Lent (in order, says a biographer, to requite the Lord in some measure for the punishment of the lash), coming thereafter to Court, her face full of joy and serenity. As time went on she carried this austerity into the small hours of the night, and entering into an apartment next the chamber where she slept with her husband, she caused her damsels to inflict a severe scourging upon her, thence returning to her husband’s side more joyful and amiable than ever, having gained comfort from these severities practised on herself and against her own weakness. Thus it was, as a contemporary poet says, she succeeded in drawing near to God and breaking the bonds of the prison of the flesh like a brave warrior of the love of the Lord.”

“That’ll do; don’t read any more; what do you think about it?”

“I have often read that same thing before.”

“That’s true; but what should you think if I decided to do the same?” she asked impetuously, like one who determines to propose something long thought about.

Genoveva stared at her with wide-open eyes, failing to understand her.

“Don’t you understand?”

“No, señorita.”

Maria got up, and throwing her arms around her neck, she whispered, her face aflame, —

"I mean, Señorita, that if you would be willing to do the office of Saint Theresa's damsels, I would imitate the saint to-night."

Genoveva vaguely assented, but still she asked, —
 "What office?"

"Oh! you stupid girl! how can I be stupid, that of giving me a few blows with a cord, to keep the memory of those which our Lord received, and to have a hint in example of him."

"Señorita, what are you saying? How did such a thing ever enter into your head?"

"It entered my head because I wish to mortify and humiliate myself at one and the same time. That is the true penance and the most pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, for the reason that he himself suffered it for us. I intended to inflict it upon myself, but I could not; and besides, it is not so efficacious as to suffer the humiliation of receiving it from the hands of another. And so you won't be willing to do this for me?"

"No, Señorita, not for anything. I couldn't do it —"

"Why not, *tonta*? Don't you see that it is for my good? If I should fail of freeing myself from a few days of purgatory because I did not do what I ask you, wouldn't you feel remorse?"

"But, my heart's dove,¹ how could you want me to maltreat you even though it were for your good?"

"Why, you have nothing left but to do it because it is a vow, and I must fulfil it; you have helped me hitherto in the road to virtue. Don't abandon me when I least expect it. You won't, Genovita? You won't, will you?"

"Señorita, for God's sake don't make me do this!"

¹ *tonta*.

² *mi palomita del alma*.

"Come, Genovita, I beg of you by the love that you bear me —"

"No! no! no! don't ask me to do it —"

"Come, you old darling,¹ do this favor for me. You don't know how bad I shall feel if you don't do it. I shall believe that you have ceased to love me."

Maria exhausted all the resources of her genius to convince her. She sat on her lap and overwhelmed her with caresses; she fondled her, now getting vexed, now entreating her, and always fixing her eyes upon her in a wheedling way impossible to resist. She was like a child asking for a forbidden toy. When she saw that her maid was softening a little, or rather was very tired of refusing, she said, with fascinating volubility: —

"Truly, *tonta*, don't believe that it is a thing of such great consequence. A bad toothache is much worse, and you know that I have had them often enough. Your imagination makes you think that it is terrible, when in reality it is a trifling thing. It all comes from the fact that it isn't done nowadays because virtue is vanished from the world, but in the good old times of religion it was a common, every-day occurrence, and no one who claimed to be a good Christian failed to perform this penance. Come, make up your mind to grant me this favor, and at the same time to do a good work. — Wait a moment, I will find what we need —"

And running to the bureau, she opened a drawer, and took out a scourge, a genuine scourge, with round wooden handle and leather cords. Then, all excited and nervous, with her cheeks on fire, she brought it to Genoveva, and thrust it into her hand. She took it mechanically, without knowing what she did. She was perfectly stupefied.

¹ *monina*, literally, little monkey.

The girl began to caress her again, encouraging her with persuasive accents ; but she did not answer a word. Then the *Señorita de Elorza*, with trembling hand, began to unloose the blue silk dress which she wore. On her face glowed the excited, anxious joy of a caprice about to be gratified. Her eyes shone with unwonted light, hinting at keen, mysterious joys ; her lips were dry, as one athirst ; the violet circle around her eyes was larger than usual, and bright crimson spots burned in her cheeks. She breathed excitedly through her nostrils, which were more than ordinarily dilated. Her white, aristocratic hands, with their slender fingers and rosy nails, loosed with strange haste the buttons of her dress. With a quick movement she freed herself from it.

“ You shall see ; I have on only my chemise and under-waist. I am all ready.”

In truth, she took off, or rather tore off, her underwaist and a skirt or two, and was left only in her chemise. She stood an instant, glanced at the instrument in *Genoveva's* hand, and over her body ran a tremor of chill, of pleasure, of anguish, of terror, and of eagerness, all at once. In a low voice, changed by emotion, she said, “ *Papa* must not know this.”

And her linen chemise slipped down on her body, catching for an instant on her hips, and then falling slowly to the floor. She was now entirely naked. *Genoveva* looked at her with ecstatic eyes, and the girl felt somewhat abashed.

“ You won't be angry with me, *Genovita* ? ” she asked, smiling.

The serving woman could only say, —

“ *Señorita*, for God's sake ! ”

“ The sooner, the better, for I shall get cold.”

In this way she wished to bring still greater pressure to bear on her servant. With a nervous movement she snatched the scourge from her left hand, thrust it into her right; again threw her arms around her neck, and giving her a kiss, whispered very softly, in a joyous tone, —

“You must ply it vigorously, for so I have promised God.”

A violent trembling took possession of her body, as she said these words; but it was a delicious trembling, which penetrated to the very depths of her being. Then, taking Genoveva by the hand, she pulled her toward the table where the Saviour’s image stood.

“Here it must be, — kneeling before our Lord.”

Her voice choked in her throat. She was pale. She bent humbly before the image, rapidly made the sign of the cross, folded her hands over her breast, and turning her face toward her maid, said, with a sweet smile, —

“Now you can begin.”

“Señorita, for God’s sake!” exclaimed Genoveva, in perfect trepidation.

Through the señorita’s eyes flashed a gleam of anger, which instantly died away; but she said, in a tone of considerable irritation: —

“Do we believe in this? Obey me, and don’t be obstinate.”

The woman, overawed, and persuaded that she was aiding in a work of piety, obeyed, laying the scourge gently enough on the señorita’s naked shoulders.

The first blows struck by the maid were so soft and gentle that they left no sign on that precious skin. But Maria was excited; she desired them to be heavier: —

“No, not like that; but with force — but wait a mo-

ment; let me take off these jewels, which are out of place at such a moment."

And hastily she tore off all the rings from her fingers, pulled out her earrings, and laid the handful of gold and precious stones at the feet of Jesus. In that same way Saint Isabel, when she prayed in church, laid her ducal crown at the foot of the altar.

She resumed her humble posture, and Genoveva, seeing that there was no escape, began relentlessly to bruise her pious mistress's flesh. The lamp shed a soft, diffused light, bathing the little boudoir in subdued brilliancy; only as it touched the jewels lying at the Redeemer's feet, it broke into beautiful fleeting sparkles. The silence at this moment was absolute; not even the mournful voice of the wind in the casements was to be heard. The room breathed an atmosphere of mystery and seclusion, which enraptured Maria and filled her with an intoxicating pleasure. Her lovely body, bared, shuddered every time that the straps of the scourge curled around it with a pang not without voluptuous pleasure. She pressed her brow to the Redeemer's feet, breathing quickly and with a certain oppression, and she felt the blood beating in her temples with strange violence, while the light golden hair at the back of the neck rose slightly under the impulse of the emotion which filled her. From time to time her pale, trembling lips said softly, —

"Go on, go on."

The lashes had already raised many rose-colored weals in her shining skin, and she did not ask for a truce. But at last the barbarous instrument brought a drop of blood. Genoveva could not restrain herself; she threw the scourge far from her, and hastened to embrace her señorita, covering her with caresses and begging her by

the salvation of her soul not to make her do such an atrocious thing again. Maria consoled her, assuring her that the flagellation had hurt her very little; and now that her ardor was somewhat cooled, and her ascetic impulses calmed, she said good night and went to her bedroom to lie down.

CHAPTER VI.

IN SEARCH OF MENINO.

"I KNOW it's you, Ricardo ; let me go !"

Ricardo did not reply.

"Come, let me go ; you see I must hurry and carry the broth to mamma."

Ricardo still blinded her eyes from behind without saying a word.

"For pity's sake let me go, Ricardo ! It isn't fair, after I have told who you were."

"In punishment for your not taking the joke gracefully, I won't let you go," said Ricardo, still clasping her eyes.

"All right, then ; I admit that it's perfectly fair."

"Ah, that's another thing ! if you submit, I will let you go. But you must pay a forfeit."

Marta, as soon as she found herself free, ran behind him with uplifted broom, so that he could not get hold of her ; thereupon she went back and again began her task of brushing up the dining-room. She had not dressed for the day. She wore a loose red gown somewhat the worse for wear, and her hair was put up in a white redicilla. But there was one very strange thing about this girl ; in an old morning dress, sometimes even ripped, and with her hair in disorder, she was prettier than when she put on her fine clothes. It may be because her peculiar style of beauty was not based on the usual rich and splendid dresses as her sister's was, but because

she was not used to wearing them (for it was rare for her to put on those which were bought for her), so that she appeared awkward and constrained when she went out; but at all events, on the street and at the theatre, Marta certainly attracted little attention, and remained entirely overshadowed by her sister's proud and splendid beauty. On the other hand, at home her graces were greatly increased; her motions were easy and unembarrassed; her eyes gained brilliancy and animation, and her whole body acquired a freedom which it lost as soon as she set foot in the street.

She swept without haste, firmly and easily, like one who always expects to finish in time, and she kept humming a march¹ very softly. She had no voice for singing or any great love for music, and all the exertions of her teachers and her liking for study struggled with this lack of musical ability. The masterpieces of music, and even the *fantasías*, *réveries*, and nocturnes, which Maria played on the piano left her cold and incapable of understanding their worth. On the other hand, she confessed with shame that certain operatic airs and many popular songs delighted her. Another thing she did not confess, though it was no less true: the bands which sometimes accompany funerals, and are, as a general rule, of the very worst sort, composed almost entirely of brass instruments, moved her deeply, even to tears. She almost never sang, but she was apt to hum softly when she was doing any work as now. From time to time she stopped to take breath, leaning for a moment on her broom, and after brushing back one or two curls which fell on her forehead, she went on with her task.

Ricardo appeared again in the door.

¹ *pasacalle*.

"Martita, are you still vexed with me?"

"If I am," she replied, between a frown and smile, "you had better make your escape, señor marqués, quick, before I dust you with the broomstick."

"But are you really vexed?"

"Certainly I am."

"Very well, then; I humbly ask your pardon," said Ricardo, getting down on his knees. "Give me all the blows you want, for I have no idea of moving."

"Come, get up, and don't be foolish! See how you are soiling your trowsers!"

"Though I should soil the very collar of my shirt, I wouldn't move until you pardoned me!"

"What a boor you are, Ricardo!"

"Many thanks!"

"Will you get up, child?"

"No; not till you pardon me."

"You must be serious, Ricardo!"

"We will speak of that by and by. Do you pardon me?"

"Yes; bother¹! yes; get up!"

Ricardo arose, went up to Marta, and taking her by the arms and shaking her violently, exclaimed, —

"How very pretty you are, little one! I don't wonder that Manolito — Of course you understand me."

"This is a great way of trying to be serious!"

"I shall be in time. Don't you worry!"

"Very well; then let me have a chance to carry mamma's broth to her."

"Do you know, I have searched the whole house and not found a soul?"

"Mamma has not left her room yet, and papa and Maria are out."

¹ *pesado*.

"Maria is at church as usual, isn't she?"

"She only went to mass; she will be back soon."

"Of course," replied the young man, becoming suddenly serious and silent.

Marta finished her work under her future brother's grave and not very careful inspection.

"Will you wait for me? I'm coming right back."

Ricardo nodded assent; and while the girl was gone, he went to one of the balconied windows and began to drum with his fingers on the glass, casting a vacant, absent look at the neighboring houses.

Marta came hurrying in again.

"Come, go with me; I am going to put the linen away."

Ricardo followed the girl like a lamb into a bright room full of clothes-presses. It looked into the garden. In the centre of it was a table on which stood a great basket heaped up with white clothes just from the wash.

"Will you help me take down this basket and put it there, near that clothes-press?"

"Why didn't you put it a little further off?"

The basket was a huge one, and it was a tug to carry it to the place designated: while they were carrying it, they got into such a frolic that more than once they had to set it down. Ricardo with his efforts grew very red in the face, and this made the girl laugh until she had no strength left. She rarely laughed; but when the flood-gates were opened, nobody could stop it. Ricardo, with his inclination to make fun, puffed out his cheeks and grew redder yet. All ill humor had completely disappeared. The basket made very little progress, and both stood bending over it and struggling with it, being unable to lift it an inch from the ground, the one splitting with laughter, and the other affecting a comic desperation.

"What a valiant soldier, to be vanquished by a basket of clothes!" exclaimed the girl, in the height of glee.

"I should like to see Prim or Espartero or even Napoleon himself here! This isn't a basket at all! There is linen enough here for an army!"

"Let go, then! If you didn't make me laugh, I could lift it by myself."

— After much laughter, and no little bantering, the basket reached its destination. Marta opened the clothes-press, from which came the distinctive, fresh, penetrating odor of fresh linen. The girl for several moments breathed it in with delight, while she was transferring the pieces from one shelf to another in order to make room for the clean clothes that she was going to put away. Then she started to call Carmen — one of the maids — to help her, but Ricardo asked timidly, —

"Listen, child, couldn't I help to do it?"

"Oh! if you would like —"

"But it isn't for me to like. Pure gold though I were, *preciosa*, it is for you to command me, as queen and mistress."

"It won't do at all."

"It's no condescension on my part; you can put me to the test."

"Well, then, this time I command you to take the two corners of this sheet and stretch them out in that direction hard — not so hard, man, how you pull me! That's the way! that's the way! Now double it as I do — so — one corner over the other — good! — now stretch it out again — more, ever so much more — that's it! Now fold it again; pull it out once more! There, that'll do. Now come towards me, — let me have it; I can manage it now. Here's another. Take the two corners — shake it

well and stretch it out. Be careful, for this one has a ruffle — don't tear it! These are mamma's and Maria's sheets."

"How it would shock Maria if she knew I were folding her sheets!" cried Ricardo, laughing.

"Why, yes; the sheets themselves are. Mamma and she like very fine ones, and have theirs made of batiste; but papa and I like them coarser. I can't bear fine sheets; I slip about in them and can't get settled. We are careful not to put any kind of ruffles on papa's, for the touch of starch tries his nerves, and the rustling keeps him awake. It's a hobby of his. Just imagine when he is travelling, and at some house they put on sheets with trimmings, he takes the trouble to pull the bed to pieces and put the ruffling under the mattress at his feet. I don't like them either, but if I find them on, I put up with them. Papa has a good many hobbies. Every night he has to go asleep with a cigar in his mouth. I walk up and down near his room until I see that he is asleep, and then I go in very gently and take the cigar from his mouth and put out the light — Don't pull so hard, for my arms ache already. The truth is, I make you do very improper things for a military man; isn't that so?"

"Don't you believe it! At college, and even after we left, at boarding-houses we had to do much worse things. How many buttons have I sewed on in my life! And how many times I have patched my trowsers when they were worn through!"

"Really?"

"Certainly!"

Marta was sincerely astonished. She could not understand that a man should have to descend to such duties when there are so many women in the world, and she

asked particularly about his college life, — how they were treated, what they ate, at what time they went to bed, who attended to their rooms, who did their washing and ironing, were their mattresses hard or soft, did they drink wine, how many times a week they gave them clean towels, etc., etc. Ricardo answered all her questions, giving a circumstantial account of his college habits with the fulness of one who has very fresh recollections, and is not bored in recounting them. From college customs he passed to his adventures, relating those which might be told to a young girl, and amusing himself above all in painting in the darkest colors the tribulations of freshman year¹ and the cruelties practised upon them by the seniors,² who compelled them to spend whole nights making cigarettes of sand so as to learn to make better ones of tobacco; in the street they would make them sit down on the stone seats and not let them get up till they gave them permission; they seated them at table, even though they had dined, just for the fun of the thing; those who were weakest would vomit or faint; one fellow who ventured to rebel against a *galonista* they kept for six months face to face with a stone wall, during all play hours, until he was taken ill with jaundice and almost died. One Sunday afternoon, while he was in the hall with five other freshmen³ reading a novel, two seniors came in and beat them furiously with cudgels until they were tired out, and gave him a painful cut near his eye.

Marta listened with profound attention, showing in her face all the phases of indignation. She pulled with greater and greater force on the sheets, and folded them any way,

¹ The epoch of *novatada*.

² *antiguos*.

³ *aueros*.

without taking her eyes from the narrator's. From time to time she exclaimed, "But, good Heavens,¹ that is abominable! Those men are crazy; why didn't you tell the president about such cruelties?" Ricardo could not persuade her that it would have been useless to rebel or tell the colonel, since hazing² was a traditional custom in the college which the officers did not care to root out. To all his reasonings she replied, "Well, I would have gone to the colonel, and if he had not made it right for me, I would have run away from college."

"Come, don't be excited, Marta, over what I went through. The men who suffer this way do the same thing. Now I am going to tell you something that took place between me and the colonel. After I became lieutenant—"

And changing his tack, he began to tell amusing adventures and jolly incidents, which smoothed out the frowns on the girl's face, and finally made her laugh heartily. Gradually the basket was emptied, and its contents were transferred to the clothes-press, which still exhaled its fresh and somewhat pungent odor of newly washed clothes. This odor filled the whole room, and gave it a refreshing perfume of health and cleanliness pleasanter than any perfumery or pomade. It was the perfume which always clung about Marta, as her father said, and seemed especially created for her. When she went alone to open the cloth-presses, she took a great delight in putting her head into them, and burying it in the clothes, enjoying the coolness of the linen against her face, and breathing with keen pleasure its healthful aroma. The light pouring through the white tulle of the curtains, the

¹ *Dios mio.*

² *novetqda.*

ceaseless chatter and the merry laughter of the young people filled the room with joy and animation; it was called the "ironing-room," for all the linen of the house was ironed there. The walls not occupied by the cloth presses were painted a plain white.

Carmen burst into the room like a hurricane, crying,

"Señorita Marta, Señorita Marta!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Marta, in alarm.

"Menino has got out, señorita!"

Marta dropped the sheet which she had in her hand and exclaimed in astonishment, —

"Has got out?"

"Yes, señorita; as I was just going through the gallery, I looked at the cage and found the door open and the bird gone!"

"Come along, come along!"

And all three rushed to the gallery. Indeed, Menino had flown away. By an incredible piece of carelessness Marta, when she fed him, and hung him up to enjoy the view of the garden and the singing of the other birds, had left the cage door open. For three years Menino had been under the young maiden's care, and during all this time he had showed no sign of cherishing plans of escape; on the contrary, hitherto the little hypocrite had always shown, as far as possible, that he did not care a straw for liberty, and that he had renounced it willingly for the sake of his dearly beloved mistress. For a long time he had been in the habit of coming out of his cage to eat chocolate with her; he would perch on her shoulder, peck softly at her hand to show his affection, hop about here and there over the furniture, and when it was time to retire, he would go back into the cage, meek as a lamb. By every presumption he was a happy canary, who re-

garded the loss of liberty as compensated by the care and attention of such a lovely girl, and by the permission to peck her rosy cheeks whenever he pleased. And aside from these more or less spiritual enjoyments, for which more than one lad in the town would have made stupendous sacrifices, and looking only at the material aspect of existence or bodily comforts, it must be laid down as a fact that Menino lived in his cage like an archbishop, with every want satisfied, supplied with hemp-seed on one side, with canary-seed on the other, at one time treated to lettuce, at others to lumps of chocolate, at others to crumbs soaked in milk ; indeed, to ask more was to offend God. And as for neatness and cleanliness of habitation, he had just as little cause for envying any one ; every morning Marta herself cleaned it out, leaving the cage like a mirror. But contrary to the general belief that he found himself perfectly satisfied, and would not change places even with the director of the mint, Menino was certainly waiting impatiently for a chance to escape ; he had allowed himself to be overwhelmed with melancholy, his character had been soured, and his bile excited by lack of exercise. If he had not gone out to breathe the fresh air on the day least expected, he would have dashed the top of his head against the bars of his cage.

As our young people stood under the cage, they deliberated briefly what to do. Marta was heart-broken. It was decided that Carmen, with the laundress and the gardener should scour the garden, for they thought that from lack of practice he would not fly very far at first ; meanwhile Marta and Ricardo should make a thorough search through the house in case he had remained inside, flying through the halls as he had done once before. Marta acted as guide, and they immediately began to look

through the suite of rooms next the corridor, a great square chamber with two sleeping-rooms leading from it, in which she and Maria, when they were children, had slept with their respective nurses. The paper on the room represented hunting-scenes, which used to make a great impression on Marta when she was small, especially one illustrating a dying stag, conquered by half a dozen ferocious hounds. Then they passed through several rooms designed for the guests who visited the house; they inspected the girls' rooms, they went down into the kitchen, which was in an entresol, and returned up stairs without any success. Then they visited Don Mariano's library, which was a magnificent room with two balconied windows facing the plaza, decorated in severe classic taste; great leather armchairs, rich tapestries, an ebony writing-desk, and bookcases of the same wood; on the walls hung a few family portraits, painted in oil. Marta always felt in this library a sensation of happiness and well-being which she did not enjoy in the other parts of the house; in this sensation there was a delicious union of reverence and tenderness wherein were blended all her childish recollections, which overflowed with this exclusive, eager, and absorbing love, such as cause the unreasonable anger of children when the nurse tears them from the paternal arms, and the yearning to go to them when they are held out to invite them. As soon as she had strength and skill enough to put his room in order, she never allowed any one else to do it. In the morning she always spent half an hour of delicious ease and comfort, dusting the huge chairs, which cost her a great effort to move from their places, and making Don Mariano's huge bed. She felt happy in that solemn patriarchal chamber. The colossal bookcases, the table, the chairs,

the pictures, and the dignified figures of the tapestries fixed on her a silent, benevolent gaze in which she felt as it were alive, her father's great, protecting shadow.

Ricardo halted lazily before a portrait:—

“Is that your aunt? How much you resemble her! What a pity she died so young! She was a very fascinating woman.”

“I should like to resemble her. She was very tall, and I am short.”

“What difference does that make? You are like her, very much like her. And that is natural, after all, for you are like your father, and you are an Elorza from head to foot. What huge bookcases Don Mariano has! there's enough here to keep one busy a good while.”

“Still, Maria has read the most of them.”

“And you?”

“Oh, I don't read very much. I am very lazy. Papa says I don't like the black,” replied the girl, with her frank smile, and looking a little ashamed; then she added: “But look, Ricardo, it isn't absolutely true, what papa says; though I don't care much for books, some of them please me; but one doesn't get time to take them up. I don't know how I manage not to have an hour for myself. Sometimes it's one thing, sometimes another.”

“Confess, little one,¹ that you don't like them, and I won't say any more!”

“If you like, I will confess it; but it isn't true. I like some of them.”

“How about Menino?”

“Ay! yes! come, come!” ✓

They went to the next room, which was Doña Gertru-

¹ *chica*.

dis's, and this alone was proof positive that no sign of Menino was there, though occasionally she had in her head such a singing, as of a whole nest of birds, that it prevented her from resting. Therefore they went to the next room, which was Marta's. It was a room which seemed lined with mirrors, since everything in it was polished, from the wooden floors to the railing of the balconies; whatever was not varnished by the cabinet-maker was rubbed bright with cloths. Marta's great hobby which gave her the most joy and the most trouble was keeping things bright. Her exaggerated love for cleanliness had quickly brought her to the point of trying to put a shine on all the articles of furniture in the house, and more especially those in her own room. Every day, aided by the maid, she rubbed them with a dry flannel, polishing them with unwearied zeal, until you could see your face in them. Then, all out of breath, sometimes dripping with perspiration, her hair in disorder, and her cheeks ablaze, she lifted the flannel and stood awhile contemplating her work, the lovely scintillations made by the light in the polished surface, with a genuine inward satisfaction, with almost mystic enthusiasm. The household made much fun of her, which caused her to hide herself while performing this task, and induced her to lock her room to everybody. Ricardo had never been in it. And so without any thought of Menino he began to inspect it with bold, inquisitive attention; he gazed at the pictures, halted in front of the toilet-table, opened the bottles, felt of the curtains, and even went into the bedroom to see the bed, uttering exclamations of astonishment at the perfect order which he found everywhere, and especially at the wonderful polish of all the furniture.

"What a pretty room you have, child. It's like a silver cup! What a lovely white little bed!"

"Ricardo, don't be inquisitive. Go away; come, Menino isn't here!"

The girl felt annoyed by the young man's curiosity. Every woman of gentle birth feels a certain modesty, if we may say so, in regard to her room, for the reason that there clings about it something like the essence of her very self which she hesitates to let a man approach; but in Marta's case, in addition to this modesty, there was a sense of shame in having her stubborn, childish fancies brought to light, like that of keeping things bright, that of placing the bottles of her dressing-table in a sort of symmetry worthy of an altar, and other such things which served her family as subjects for merriment at dinner time. Consequently she tried to push him out by main force.

"Come Ricardo; there's nothing to see here. Come along, come along!"

"Do let me, *niña*, do let me have a look at this charming room! How exquisite!" And putting his nose to the bed, he said with great seriousness, "It smells like Marta!"

"Will you be quiet, you foolish fellow!"¹

"It may not give you any trouble to keep your room in this way, but let me tell you, child, I couldn't keep it so if my life depended on it. If you were to see my room, Martita!"

"Yes, yes, it must be fine! You always were a disorderly fellow.² But come, dear, come; let us go!"

"We'll go whenever you please. My room is a stable compared with this; but just consider that it's open to dogs and cats, the gardener, with his dirty feet, the

¹ *majadero*.

² *un adan*.

coachman, with the smell of the stable, and, in fact, to every living creature. It is not my fault."

From Marta's room they passed through various other apartments, the dining-room, the parlor, the gallery of the court, another private room, and a few others, without finding Menino anywhere. As they were standing in the midst of a passage-way without knowing whither to turn, an idea suddenly struck Marta, and she said, —

"Let's go to the terrace; we haven't been there yet."

The terrace was now only a large hall tiled with marble and covered over with stained glass. It was called the terrace because it had been one in former times; but Don Mariano had had it closed in with glass a few years before, transforming it into a handsome, fantastic room in Moorish style, where he went to drink coffee on summer evenings with his daughters and friends. It was for the most part unfurnished, having only in one corner three or four small marquetry tables and a few rocking-chairs. When our young people reached this hall, they found it flooded with light: the sun, that morning leaving his long seclusion, came forth bright and warm, resolved on visiting all the corners of the city; and when he found the thousand crystals of the Elorza terrace, not caring to see anything better, he passed through them and revelled inside with a lively, eager pandiculation which occupied the whole circuit of the room. It was a magical sight. Thousands of rose, green, yellow, purple, gray, and blue lights burned within it, pouring over the floor, the ceiling, and the walls, and dissolving into an infinity of tints, delighting and dazzling the eyes. Over the mosaic pavement fell a shower of blinding rays, reflecting up in a delicate, many-colored vapor; and these rays were crossed and interwoven in the air, making a flame-bearing

web, subtle and beautiful, through the interstices of which passed the intangible scintillations of other rays more diaphanous, from which arose a vapor still more aerial. And these veils of dust, of rays, of scintillations, and of colors, stretching one behind the other, in spite of their transparency scarcely allowed you to see with vague indefiniteness, as through a mist, the crystals and arabesques of the windows. The sun squandered his treasures of light and color like a Turkish pasha within the walls of some chamber in the East, proving once more that when he endeavors to make a brilliant and fanciful decoration with them, there is no stage director with all his spangles, *Bengalas*, and curtains who can equal him.

Our young people, entirely forgetting Menino, stopped an instant in surprise at the whimsical, magical work of the light; and without saying a word they entered the hall and went to the centre with the slow, uncertain step of one who goes into a bath. In point of fact they stood submerged and inundated in a luminous vapor wherein all possible colors were floating.

“How beautiful the terrace is to-day!” said Marta at last.

“It seems like a room in an enchanted palace. It would be more appropriate if, instead of us, a Moor in a white turban stood here, and a odalisque covered with brocade and precious stones. How many capricious effects of light! Wait a moment, Martita; step into this ray of rosy light. If you could see what a peculiar expression it gives your face now! You look like a gypsy, — a daughter of the desert.”

Indeed, that light turned the girl's fair complexion to brown, kindled it with a sunset tinge, and animated it with the ardent, cruel expression of southern natures.

All the innocence of her eyes, all the purity of her maidenly form were lost under the power of that perverse, luxuriant flame, which transformed her into another being, fiery, and at the same time voluptuous, and certainly far from her own true nature. Ricardo understood this, and said, —

“No! that color does not suit you. Come into this one!”

And he drew her under a ray of greenish light: —

“Heavens! you look like a dead person! No, no; that’s just as bad! Here, try the yellow color; that goes well, but it makes you ruddy, and brunettes ought to stay brunettes, — I mean dark-haired people, — for of course we know that your complexion is light; come, try the blue. Oh, superb! wonderful! How beautiful you are, child!”

The young marquis was right. Blue, which is the most spiritual, the purest, and the sublimest of colors, was admirably adapted for Marta’s bright face. The sun-ray fell on it like a caress from heaven, bathing it sweetly in a diaphanous light. Her long black hair assumed a purplish tint, while the adorable oval of her face and her firm, mellow neck were softly tinged with a heavenly blue. The delicate line of her regular features acquired an ideal perfection, and her whole countenance was transfigured with an angelic expression of beatitude.

Nevertheless, there was a certain exaggeration not in good taste in that rapturous, celestial expression given by the blue light. It was not the true Marta, ingenuous and modest in her looks as in her features, but a different Marta, affected, theatrical, and fantastic. Ricardo finally declared that no light was so becoming to her as the natural.

The girl suddenly exclaimed, —

"And Menino!"

"It's true; we had forgotten him. But where shall we go now? we have looked everywhere."

"Let us go to Maria's room; perhaps it has flown up there."

"It does not seem to me likely; however, let's go there."

They mounted to the tower, but without any better success; neither in Maria's room nor in Genoveva's did they find any sign of the canary-bird. Ricardo felt a peculiar emotion in entering his lady-love's room, and Marta did not fail to notice it. He became graver and more silent, and began to examine with interest everything there, moving the articles, opening the scent-bottles, and even pulling out the drawers, so that the girl felt obliged to interfere.

"Don't meddle with her things. When Maria comes and sees her things tumbled up, she will be angry."

"And what if she is?" replied the young man, with a touch of asperity.

"The blame will be thrown on me."

"All right; then tell her that it was mine, and that'll settle the matter."

He stepped into the bedroom, lifted the bed-curtains, took up the books from the dressing-table, laid them down again, and finally pulled out the table drawer. In it were a number of articles laid away, but he thrust in his hand, pulling out one more extraordinary than the rest. It was a large leather cross, full of brass brads on one side, and with a cord to attach it to the neck.

"What is this?" he asked, turning it over and over in his hand, with amazement.

Marta guessed what it was.

"Put it back, put it back! for God's sake, Ricardo! Maria will be very angry."

"Horrors! What an abominable thing! This must be a cilicium."

"It may be; but put it back, put it back for Heaven's sake!"

The young man threw it violently into the drawer again, with a gesture of scorn and disgust, —

"Maria has become crazy. It is an abomination, and there's no good in it."

"Don't say that; it's wrong. Maria is very religious, —"

"Religious! religious!" muttered the young fellow, angrily. "So are you, and you don't have to perform these penances —"

"Don't compare me with Maria!"

Ricardo began to pace up and down the room excitedly and without speaking. Then he returned to the chamber, and pulled out the leather cross once more, examining it with more care.

"It seems to me that these nails form letters. Look! Can you make out what they say?"

"No; I don't see anything; it's your imagination."

"Yes, yes; there is an inscription on it. But, however, I don't care to bother with deciphering it. All these things are only absurdities. Come, child, come along! Let every fool have his folly!"

And shutting the drawer angrily he left the chamber, followed by Marta. As they were passing by one of the windows of the boudoir, the girl uttered a cry of surprise and joy, —

"Look, look! Ricardo! Look! there's Menino!"

The young man hurried to the window, and saw, on

the roof of the house, not very far away, Menino himself, hopping about with delight, and full of pride and stateliness.

“What a rascal! And so that’s where he’s gone! We must catch him. Where do you get out on the roof?”

“Not here; we must go down to the house first, and climb up through the skylight.”

“Come on, then!”

They left the tower, and after crossing several rooms, they mounted the garret stairs leading from one of them. It was extremely dark, and the young man met with much difficulty. On the second step he received a tremendous knock.

“Oh, of course you aren’t used to it. You’ll hurt yourself; give me your hand and I’ll guide you.”

He took the girl’s hand, which was small but firm and solid like an Amazon’s; it was not so satiny as Maria’s, for her work about the house had hardened it somewhat; in compensation it had the lovely smoothness which testifies to health and good blood. It was not feverish either like Maria’s, but was always cool and moist and ready for any emergency, like those of a daughter of the people.

The young marquis did not think of making these observations, for he was going along, intent only on not falling. They reached the garret,—feebly lighted here and there by a few very tenuous rays of sunlight which filtered through the cracks in the tiles. After they had gone quite a distance, Marta dropped his hand, saying,—

“Wait here; I am going to open the window.”

And nimbly hurrying ahead, she ran up a half-dozen steps which led to the skylight, and threw open the door.

A burst of intense, bright, comforting sunshine suddenly invaded the whole garret, dazzling our young hero.

"Here is Menino! Here's Menino!" cried Marta, enthusiastically, as she stood on the top step. "He's very near! Menino! Menino! Come, *tonto*, here! here! Don't you know me?"

Menino, who was only six or eight steps away when he heard his mistress's voice, bent his head gracefully, as if to listen. The sunlight, falling full on him, bathed his yellow plumage, making him contrast so vividly with the red-colored roof that he seemed like a bit of living gold. He hopped thrice or four times, as though he were going to Marta, and said, *Pii, pii*.

"Do you want me to try to get him?" asked Ricardo.

"No; hold still a moment; he seems to be coming of his own accord. Menino, Menino! come here, pretty one; come here, come!"

Menino came two or three hops nearer, and seemed to be cocking his head to listen. I don't know what then passed through his brain; something low, and base, and shameful, it must have been, according to the morality of his species, for, forgetting his mistress's tender attentions, her ceaseless caresses, the many bits of chocolate shared with her, the feasts of biscuits, and his overflowing dishes of canary-seed, he cleaned his feathers in her presence with perfect indifference, several times repeated his *pii, pii*, with affected laziness, and spreading his wings, he launched into space, flying out of sight amid the foliage of the neighboring gardens.

Marta uttered a cry of grief.

"My stars, he has gone!"

"Has gone?"

"Yes!"

“Very far?”

“Out of sight.”

“Then, sir, he’s gone for good!”

Ricardo mounted to the window, and following the direction indicated by the girl’s finger, he looked and looked again, until his eyes pained him, without seeing the slightest sign of anything resembling a canary bird. When he looked at Marta again, he saw a tear rolling down her cheeks.

“Aren’t you ashamed to cry for a bird, *tonta!*”

“You are right!” replied the girl, trying to laugh, and wiping away the tear with her handkerchief.

“But I felt as much affection for him as for a person; yes indeed, for three years I have been taking care of him!”

CHAPTER VII.

HUSBAND OR SOUL.

THE dew of grace kept falling copiously on the soul of the eldest daughter of the Elorzas. The Christian virtues flourished in her like mystical roses replete with fragrance, and with the impatience and ardor which characterized all her actions, she continued to mount one by one the rounds on the ladder of perfection leading to heaven. Her deeds of charity and humility not only filled those who lived near her with astonishment, but were bruited about the whole town, serving as an edifying example for young and old, and as a theme of conversation among the clergy. Her fasts and penances, always growing more frequent and severe, increased the enthusiasm and seraphic joy of her soul; but at last they had a naturally weakening effect upon her health. Her delicate constitution began to rebel against so much mortification of the flesh, and to protest at every instant by pains, sometimes in her heart, at others in her stomach, at others in her head, and yet she endured it all with enviable resignation, and did not let it discourage her saintly endeavors. She suffered frequently from fainting fits in which she remained long unconscious, and from severe convulsions; some days she could not retain the food that she ate, and on others she complained of acute headaches. Don Maximo began to prescribe preparations of iron, sea-baths, and wine of quinine, and this treatment brought about some improvement, but not much; the doctor finally declared that unless she entirely changed her mode of

life, these attacks would not cease ; but it was impossible to persuade her.

Maria began to notice with a secret pride, of which she tearfully accused herself to her father confessor, that she inspired admiration and something more than respect among the people ; that when she went along the street, many saluted her with words of praise, and when she was at church, all the faithful gazed at her with peculiar persistence. Through the mouth of the servants many such flattering phrases came to her ears, as that her virtues were worthy of the most venerable priests and the most pious souls of the community, and, as she perceived a certain sweet savor in them, she forbade their being repeated to her. Many ladies consulted with her on matters concerning their consciences, and she was appointed teacher of a Sunday-school for adult women, to whom she began to explain the doctrine and moral precepts of Christianity with so much clearness and eloquence that nothing else was talked about. On the second Sunday the hall granted by the board of magistrates¹ in an old convent was crowded not only with servants and working-girls, for whom the institution had been founded, but also with the most distinguished ladies in town, desirous of seeing for themselves what was reported of the young woman. And indeed they had to agree that she had decided gifts for teaching, — an artless, animated discourse, manners free from conceit, and unwearied patience. The girls made notable progress under her direction. Not satisfied with this, she asked and obtained from her father permission to use a pavilion which he had in his garden, and there she gathered every day a dozen orphan children, whom she taught to read, write, and say their prayers, giving

¹ *ayuntamiento*.

them an education suitable to their sex and social position. The extreme gentleness with which she treated her scholars soon won their love, and even their adoration.

From every side our virtuous heroine received unimpeachable evidence of the great regard in which she was held, but more especially in the society of the devout and saintly, among whom she was considered as a brilliant beacon kindled for the advantage of religion. In the age of unbelief, whereunto we have attained, the spectacle of such a beautiful, well-educated, and illustrious maiden, consecrating herself exclusively to the practice of the virtues and religious deeds, could not fail to have a heartfelt influence on the morals of the town.

One morning, as she was leaving the steps of the altar, where she had just received holy communion, her face presented such a sanctified expression that a woman left the throng, and, kneeling before her, asked for her blessing. Maria, disturbed and perplexed, would have refused, but finally she had no other escape than by yielding to her entreaties. On another occasion, as she was going through one of the suburbs with Genoveva, a poor woman, who was standing at the door of a wretched hovel with a dying child in her arms, begged her to take him into hers and offer a Pater Noster for him; Maria did so to satisfy her, but protested that she was a miserable sinner, to whom God could not listen. The child, however, had scarcely felt the tender caress of her lovely hand before it began to smile, and in a few days was entirely restored to health. This miraculous cure, proclaimed by the grateful mother, made a great noise among the people; whereupon the house of Elorza was besieged by a throng of women who came with their sick children to ask Maria to take them in her arms and bless them.

As this partook of the nature of wonder-working, according to report, Maria hastened to consult her confessor whether she ought to continue yielding to the entreaties of these afflicted mothers ; and the priest, after taking a day to reflect, replied that he saw no harm in it, but, on the other hand, believed that it might redound to the advantage of the faith. "How is it possible," asked Maria, "for God to be willing to perform miraculous deeds through the medium of such a low and sinful creature as I am?" And the confessor replied that it showed great audacity to think of searching the high purposes of God, and that she should abstain from making such irreverent remarks ; that God chose whomever He pleased to manifest His sacred will, and that, at all events, even though no miracle took place, it was never wrong to attribute to the power of the Almighty the blessings which we experience both in soul and body. Maria accepted this reasoning, and endeavored, by all the means at her command — by prayer, humility, and penance — to make herself worthy of these incredible favors which God gave into her hand.

Gradually, through the renunciation to which she was compelled by her pious life, all the ties that bound her soul to things earthly began to be relaxed. At first she shunned all worldly recreation and amusement, such as balls, theatres, and promenades, where she used to shine by her beauty and elegance, and she came to the point of abhorring them. Then she abstained from certain proper recreation, such as singing and playing secular music, taking part in games of cards, walking in the garden, being present at tertulias at her home ; in her craze for crucifying the flesh, she went to the extreme of not gazing often at the landscape from the windows of her room, and of depriving herself of breathing the scent of the flowers and

the perfume of her colognes. Still, however, and for some time, she took pleasure in dressing elegantly; this arose from a reflection that she had read in a French devotional book, counselling young people not to neglect the neatness and adornment of the body, since God took delight in seeing them beautiful and knowing that they adorned themselves for Him alone. At the same time that she grew more and more to hate the pleasures of this world, she crushed out in her heart the sentiment of love towards human beings, even towards those who were nearest and dearest to her. Understanding that if one would love God, he must free himself from earthly affections, since no other is worthy of entering into a heart consecrated to the Creator, she constantly struggled against her love not only for her betrothed but also that for her parents and sister. She ceased those frequent outbursts of affection which she used to lavish on them all and which had always proved the tenderness of her affectionate spirit; when she met her father in the morning, she no longer threw her arms around his neck and covered him with caresses; she no longer revealed to her sister the secrets and sorrows of her heart; she kept everybody at a distance by a cautious reserve veiled in sweetness and humility. The Señorita de Elorza compelled herself to follow literally the solemn words of Jesus: "*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*"¹

The fervor which constantly died away, as far as human beings were concerned, burned like a sweet-smelling incense on a lofty altar, to an object infinitely more worthy of it. Her heart could not remain inactive; she

¹ Luke xiv. 26.

had to love, for it was the law of her being; she had to overflow with enthusiasm for something on which she should engage her thoughts every instant of her life, and offer continual sacrifices. Maria could not desire anything or love anything, without feeling herself stirred by a consuming fervor. When she was a child, she had loved another little girl of her own age, a child of dark complexion, with great, cruel, black eyes, and she loved her so passionately that she became her willing slave; the little black-eyed girl, the daughter of a poor mechanic, treated her with the authority of a queen and mistress, demanded from her all the playthings that she possessed, compelled her to submit to all her caprices, humiliated her whenever she felt like it, and oftentimes abused her in word and deed, without the affection of her enthusiastic friend being diminished in the least. On one occasion, when the two were ironing a doll's skirt, the cruel little girl said, in a disagreeable tone of mockery, "If you love me so dearly, why don't you put this hot iron on your arm for me?" Maria, without a moment's hesitation, pulled up the sleeve of her dress, and laid the heated iron on her arm, making a terrible burn. On account of other such actions as these, which had attracted Don Mariano's attention, he drove this unworthy friend out into the street, and forbade her ever darkening the door of his house again, a prohibition which broke his daughter's heart with grief.

When a heart is to this degree inflammable, its constant tendency is to take fire and be consumed with some extraordinary love; and if the object is not at hand, it seeks for it as one athirst seeks the fountain of crystalline water. Maria had sought hard for it and found it, — a love pure and immortal, sublime and marvellous; love for a

God who crushes the stars to powder and enters the enamored soul like a gentle lamb. This love, which took more and more violent possession of her soul, was not only manifested in almost incomprehensible deeds of humility and mortification, but also escaped continually from her lips in passionate phrases, which winged themselves away like timid birdlings to take refuge in the sacred heart of Jesus. At first she had prayed with respectful worship, with soul and body prostrate, terrified rather than melted, like one who makes a declaration of love; but according as she understood, by a thousand manifest signs, that Jesus replied to her passionate affection and returned it with increase, she found greater freedom and eloquence in her words and a more enduring felicity in her whole being.

The happiest moments of her life were those which she consecrated to prayer, which in her case was a sweet colloquy of two lovers, incomprehensible for those who have never fathomed the secret depths of the divine love or tasted the delights of the mystical union. By dint of holding converse with God, of communicating to Him her most occult thoughts and feelings, of confessing with tears each day the most trivial spots on her conscience, she succeeded in bringing about with the Almighty a sacred familiarity, full of joy and consolation. At the twilight hour, after she had ceased from the pious tasks which kept her busy all the day, she was in the habit of retiring to her room to enjoy at her ease the sweet delights which Jesus granted to her fervent prayers as a recompense for the labors and humiliations of the day.

One calm, quiet evening, toward the end of winter, Maria found herself in her room, prostrate in prayer, before the image of Jesus. All the blinds were open to let

in the slowly fading light. From the one that looked inland could be seen the wide stretch of level meadows, and the gentle hills on the horizon bathed in a purple vapor, which grew thicker and thicker till it changed to mist. From the one facing the river could be seen its tranquil surface, motionless as though all that sheet of water had been suddenly changed to stone; near El Moral were four or five low sand-hills called appropriately *Los Arenales*, which, struck by the last rays of the setting sun, gleamed like mighty topazes. Not the slightest sound disturbed the silence of the boudoir, which at that moment, by reason of its gloom and loneliness, was like a great confessional.

For a long hour the young woman had been communing with the Beloved of her heart, and no earthly thought had made its way into her enraptured spirit. Never had she felt herself so abstracted and lifted above the flesh, above mundane interests. All the life of her body had gone to her heart, which beat with unwonted violence. She kept her eyes closed. After she had repeated all the prayers that she could remember, some of them composed purposely for her, she allowed her lips to rest, and abandoned herself to a delicious meditation in which her imagination wandered away as if in a boundless field enamelled with flowers. Both her confessor and her books of devotion counselled her to think often on the bloody passion and death of the Redeemer, and so she had done until she was filled with grief and burdened with tears. In her mind she saw that agonized, grief-stricken face of Jesus nailed upon the cross, those dying eyes lifted, wherein still burned the eternal love and compassion of a God. When she saw him going toward Calvary, laden with the heavy cross and stumbling, once, again, and yet

again, overcome by fatigue, not finding in the bloodthirsty faces of those who surrounded him one look of sympathy, she felt her throat contract and her breast choke with sobs. She had been present at all the agonies of Christ, one after the other, from the memorable night in the garden until the moment when he closed his eyes forever between the two thieves, the victim of the perfidy of men. The sublime words of pardon which he uttered as he died rang in her ears like a promise of heaven and a hope of seeing him once more, haloed with glory, in the other life.

But at this moment her thought shunned the death scenes. Around her floated smiling, glorious forms, which filled her with a delicious joy such as she had but few times experienced before, accompanied by an unspeakable physical comfort. It seemed to her that she felt a most delicious sensation of warmth radiating from her heart even to her hands and feet, as though she were plunged in a bath of warm milk. At the same time soft fragrant hands held her eyelids closed, while a gentle breeze cooled her brow. The boudoir in the tower was filled with vague, subtle sounds, which her imagination transformed into mysterious harmonies. She was so beside herself that she could not tell whether she was in reality awake, although she had possession of all her faculties. Little by little she began to lose her power of volition; she tried to open her eyes and could not; she tried to separate her hands, which she kept folded, and she had no better success. A superior power held her in its sway, but so gently that for nothing in the world would she have broken those bands; it was a celestial swooning of her whole being, which carried her away into ecstasies such as she had never known before. Tears streamed down over her face like an exquisite ichor, bath-

ing her lips with sweetness, and flowing from her lips into the very centre of her being, filling her heart as with a most gentle unction, as with a mighty perfume. This ichor intoxicated her and strengthened her at once, and she did not weary of drinking it. Its salubrious strength penetrated her emaciated body, bestowing on it an incomprehensible force. She entered into a life full and divine, where no pains existed; into an ecstatic lethargy full of soft delight, from which were born a throng of vague longings, like flowers opening for an instant and shedding perfume from their calyxes. The longings of her soul likewise spread and were quenched in the immense joy which took hold of her.

While her body was sleeping in this sweet hallucination of the senses, her mind was attent with a marvellous activity. Her memory was bathed in brilliancy, and her imagination, in precipitate flight, darted out into the universe. Instead of meditating on the death of the Lord, she thought with deep delight about his adorable life, and, completely enchanted, she reviewed all its occurrences, representing them with as much accuracy as though she had really been present at the time. First, she beheld Jesus at his birth in the grotto near Bethlehem, embracing with his sweet arms the Virgin's neck, and smiling at the shepherds and the Magi, who from far-distant countries came to adore him. She beheld him secretly transported to Egypt, crossing the deserts of Arabia, sleeping on his mother's lap under some tree or in the depths of some cavern. Then she found him in the porticos of the Temple of Jerusalem, seated in the midst of the doctors, though he was only twelve years of age, with his long golden hair curling in ringlets over his shoulders, and his white tunic falling in graceful folds.

till it hid his feet, astonishing them all by his more than human beauty as well as by the profound wisdom of his words. She contemplated him in his modest dwelling in Nazareth in the peace of an obscure and contemplative life, nourishing his divine spirit with the sublime truths which the Eternal Father vouchsafed him during his frequent solitary walks. Then she was present at his first ministrations through Galilee, and at the first miracle, with which he manifested his infinite power at the wedding of Cana. She accompanied him to Capernaum when, as he stood in a fishing-boat gently rocking on the waves, he addressed to the multitude gathered on the shore his discourse, clearer than the sun which shone upon them, sweeter than the evening breeze. She returned with him to Nazareth, where his stubborn, ungrateful countrymen were unmoved by his gentleness and power of speech and rejected him. She went to Bethany, where her name-saint Mary Magdalene and Martha her sister had the blessedness of giving him hospitality, and the former of sitting long at his feet and listening to his words. She saw him everywhere serene and beautiful, as he is represented by tradition, with his blue eyes of wonderful sweetness, his skin rosy and transparent, his beard pointed, and his golden hair parted in the middle and falling in waves on his shoulders. The numerous pictures which she had seen, not only of his divine person, but of the country where his ministrations had taken place, united to her powerful imagination, carried her back to the time of the Redeemer's life more vividly than one could conceive. But where her imagination most revelled was in seeing his entrance into Jerusalem followed by a multitude carried away by enthusiasm, amid hosannas and shouts of welcome; then his beautiful face,

which almost disappeared amid the foliage of the palm-branches, assumed an expression of divinity, his eyes so gentle flashed with the effulgence of omnipotence, and he spread out his hands toward the city, granting it pardon in advance for its barbarous deicide. Oh, how her soul delighted in this fine, poetic scene where Jesus was given on earth a little of the adoration which was his due! If she had been in those happy places, she would have taken part in the cortege of the King of kings, and raised her voice in acclamation. The union in him of power and humility, of force and gentleness, filled her with enthusiasm and admiration.

She knew, however, that Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem was repeated daily in a mystic sense; that the divine Lord takes more pleasure in entering into the soul of his elect than into the ungrateful daughter of Zion; that love was efficacious against the absolute master of all things, and took pleasure in receiving whoever professed his name. But for this it was necessary to love him much, to love him in such a manner as to prefer pain and torment coming from his hand to the most exquisite delight of earth, to love him even to fainting and dying in his presence and falling prone at his feet under the majesty of his gaze; it was necessary to spend long hours watching for him in the depths of the sky, in the calm of the eventide, in the beauty of flowers, of birds, and of all creatures, at the bedside of the sick and dying, in the midst of sorrows and penances; it was necessary to let the hours pass in ecstatic prayer, feeling the tears stealing down, and the cheeks on fire; it was necessary to be obedient to all men, the humble servant of all men, to turn the mind from accepting all favors, even from one's parents, and to despise one's self, to be the beloved

of Jesus. Thus, thus she loved him! How many hours of the day and night she had spent thinking of him! How many tears she had shed for his sake! How many times in the silence of the night had her soul gone forth, fired with sickness of love, like the bride of the mystic Song of Solomon, in search for the Lord and Master of her heart! And when she had, in this manner, sought for him, kindled with amorous yearning, she never failed to find him. On one occasion, having spent the whole day ministering to the sick in the hospital, she had felt at the hour of retiring such keen delight in her soul and body that she almost fell in a swoon. When she humbled herself before any one, she felt an exquisite delight; in crucifying her flesh with sharp cruelties she had felt more pleasure than the world with its harassing joys had ever given. In this way Jesus began to return a thousand-fold the love which she professed for him, transforming in her case into comfort what to others was pain and penance.

This last consideration pierced so sharply into her spirit that it caused her to indulge in an infinitude of thanksgivings and blessings, which remained locked in her heart without issuing from her lips. Her lips were silent, motionless as those of the sphynx; for she did not dare to reproduce by the medium of sounds the ineffable thoughts that passed through her mind. She heard within herself a thousand sweet voices speaking to her, but she could not understand what they said; she felt as though she were lifted up by gentle arms which ceaselessly lavished caresses upon her, and she was conscious, though not by visual proof, of the presence of a supernatural being, consoling her with its power. Then she became suddenly convinced that the Lord loved her; she saw

clearly with the eyes of the Spirit that the Bridegroom listened to the voice of the bride, and had no deeper desire than to take her to himself, to pour out upon her all riches and joys forevermore. Even now he was near at hand; she felt him at her side, and she was melted with desire to look upon him; but he showed himself not; he refused to yield to her warm, affectionate entreaties. As one who shows a dainty to a child and then hides it, and again brings it forth and once more hides it in order to stir his appetite, so the heavenly Bridegroom kept her in suspense and ravishment, kindling more and more her desire. The impassioned stanza of San Juan de la Cruz came into her mind:—

*“Ay! who else has power to mend me!
 Prithee deign to make my humble heart thy dwelling;
 I beseech thee now to send me
 Faithful angels not incapable of telling
 Truly all the longing in me welling!”*¹

And a thousand times she repeated it mentally, with a sublime solicitude, in which it seemed as though her soul were going to burst forth through her lips. But her lips remained speechless; she wished to cry out, to break into praises of Jesus, to give vent to the passionate impulses of her breast, and it was impossible. She felt a strange oppression, torturing her with celestial death, which she would not exchange for a hundred lives.

A keen, eager, resistless desire suddenly took possession of her heart. Jesus, the King of souls, had granted

¹ *Ay! quién podrá sanarme!
 Acaba de entregarte ya de vero,
 No quieras enviarme
 De hoy mas ya mensajero
 Que no saben decirme lo que quiero.*

to more than one favors which were terrible by their very grandeur and incomprehensibility. He had appeared to Saint Isabel after her prodigious deeds of charity and penance, and had said, "Isabel, if thou art willing to be mine, I also am willing to be thine and will never leave thee." Frequently he had come to Saint Catalina of Siena in her convent cell, had conversed with her, had walked with and many times had helped her offer up her prayers. He had taken Saint Teresa in his arms so that she could not move, and had lavished caresses and kisses upon her. If she might only win such regalement! Scarcely had this overweening thought been born in her mind before she was filled with fear, and felt such shame that she would gladly have had the earth open and swallow her up. "Oh, no, my God! Who am I to receive such a favor, granted only to the martyrs of charity and the seraphic virgins who shine in heaven like bright stars. Pardon me, Jesus mine, pardon me!"

But her audacious thought would not depart from her mind; it kept following her in spite of her strongest efforts to shake it off. She was unworthy of such glory, she knew well, but her yearning was the child of the love with which the divine Jesus had filled her heart to overflowing; thus not she but Jesus himself was the author of this desire. If he had not kindled in her his celestial love, and had not begun to pour out upon her favors as sweet as they were undeserved, such an absurd idea would never have entered her head. No; she asked not so great a grace, so great a consolation; it was enough for her that Jesus was willing to give himself to her, that she had a few particles of his immortal love. She should consider herself the most blessed among the virgin daughters of heaven, if at the end of long years of prayer and penance, of dis-

terness and tribulations, Jesus should allow her once only to touch her lips to his divine face. "O Jesus mine, is it sinful to ask this? Could such a base worm as I ever deserve a joy so infinite?"

She opened her eyes. Jesus, with his golden aureole shining amid the shadows, as it reflected the last melancholy light that came through the window, lifted his hands towards her, at the same time fastening upon her a profound, sweet gaze. Through her veins ran a sensation of chill, as though she were near to death; but instantly this was supplanted by another of such intense heat that it made the sweat start from all the pores of her body. She comprehended vaguely that an adorable mystery was taking place in her presence, and a holy fear seized her. The boudoir was wrapt in shadow: the windows seemed like great, colorless eyes gazing through the walls. A sweet, languid delectation took possession of her whole being, and overwhelmed her with bliss. Her fear vanished. She was filled with the certainty that she was loved by Jesus, that she was the bride-elect of a God. Tenderness, worship, joy, welled up in her bosom, and she could not take her eyes from the eyes of the Lord, drinking from them the mysterious, ineffable delight of glory.

Once more the desire came back to her mind. This time she promulgated it with words, the warm breath of which stole through her hands crossed before her face.

"Jesus mine, wouldst thou permit thy servant to touch her lips to thy divine person?"

Jesus bent forward still more graciously. Maria felt her hair stand on end, and her heart wanted to leap from her breast. His voice like music penetrated into the soul of the young girl, who believed that she was dead and translated to heaven.

Jesus had said, —

“*Arise, my beloved, my fair one, and come.*”

“Lord, I am not worthy!” exclaimed Maria, with a cry at once of anguish and of joy.

Again Jesus said, —

“*Thou art all beautiful, my beloved; there is no blemish in thee.*”

“My Jesus, thee I love above all things!”

“*My dove, show me thy face, let thy voice sound in mine ears, for thy voice is sweet, and thy face is beautiful,*” replied Jesus, bending still nearer.

Then the girl, carried away by glory and enthusiasm, threw her arms about the knees of the Lord, and flooded them with her tears, saying, between her sobs, like the bride in the sacred book, —

“*My soul melted within me when my beloved spake.*”

And little by little, her arms clinging to the body of Jesus, stole slowly, slowly upwards, till they were fastened around his neck. Her breath failed her, and she felt her memory, her imagination, and all her powers give way, fading into an immense, eager bliss, in which her whole being was plunged as in the purest ether. Her face drew near the Lord's. She touched with her cheeks the cheeks of the Bridegroom; she put her lips to the whiteness of his brow, to the effulgence of his eyes, to the coral of his lips.

And in the chief room of the tower, silent, buried in darkness, was long heard the sound of sobs and subdued kisses. At last, a human body, the body of the Señorita de Elorza, senseless, fell heavily at full length upon the floor. Genoveva, when she came in with a light, found her there still in the swoon, with eyes open and fixed, reflecting in her face a celestial joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

THE spring came. The northeast winds, like a gigantic besom swung by the hand of some god with a passion for cleanliness, constantly swept away the dust and ashes of the firmament. The sailors who put out at daybreak after fish, as they set foot on the quay often saw above the distant houses of El Moral a wide strip of azure sky, which went on slowly spreading to the four points of the compass, leaving a few tenuous shreds of violet cloud like great eyebrows overhanging the horizon. The vast sheet of the river now gave forth lovely blue sparkles in place of the melancholy, metallic reflections of the winter; and the wooden hulks called *barcos* by a misnomer, pitched in the dock like colts impatient to be off. But in the afternoon winter still clung to its rights; now spreading over town and river a thick mantle of fog which quickly changed into storm; now furiously driving across the sky colossal black clouds which discharged their freight as they flew inland. Some days, however, at sunset a breath of genial air came from the land, and brought the delightful tidings to the peaceful inhabitants of Nieva that the most lovely and coquettish of the seasons was present in that jurisdiction; and this breath of air laden with perfumes, reaching by the medium of the nostrils to the brains of those inhabitants who were most inclined to poesy and sweet expansions of the heart, manifested itself as the avowed enemy of tranquillity in

feminine minds, and as the infamous disturber of peace in families. The town slept placidly like a sultana, receiving the adulatory caresses of this breeze. Nevertheless, the calm underneath the roofs was more apparent than real; a large part of the inhabitants slept the sleep of the righteous as before, but another no less numerous and estimable, without knowing any reason for it, awoke more than once in the course of the night, and occasionally spent an hour unsuccessfully wooing sleep by lighting the lamp, and reading the articles in *The Times*.¹ They drank great goblets of water; they dreamed fifty thousand absurd dreams, which, when they remembered them in the morning, made the worthy natives smile, and more than one, and more than two, caught colds on their lungs by getting uncovered at night. In the two apothecary shops of the town a prodigious quantity of pearl barley was disposed of; some banished wine from the table to the astonishment of their wives; and the behavior of young men toward the girls became extremely dulcified. The Market Street² bookseller sent to Madrid for a quantity of novels by Paul de Kock and Adolphe Belot on commission for his customers, and the professor of the piano made a similar demand on the music publishers, for various sentimental romanzas with erotic titles, such as *Vorrei morir*, *Tutto per te*, *Non posso vivere*, and others of like quality at the request of his pupils. The swallows began to take possession of the corridors, and after making love for a few days, chasing each other through the air with obstreperous chirpings and then retiring couple by couple to the most remote corners of the gardens, without any thought of Mrs. Grundy or of due

¹ *El Vapor*.

² *Calle de la Industria*.

formality; they celebrated their nuptials with the same freedom, without consulting the desires of papas or asking for a special dispensation, or by publishing the banns through the office of the parochial priest, or by ordering a trousseau from Paris, or by receiving a miserable coffee service from relatives, or sending cards to friends and acquaintances, announcing their indissoluble union; or even by having a notice inserted in the *Correspondencia de España*, saying: "Yesterday, before a numerous and select assemblage, in which were included the most illustrious members of the nobility and the world of politics, and literature, were celebrated in the house of the bride the long announced nuptials of the most beautiful and distinguished dame swallow, Lady Such an One, to the wealthy sir swallow, Lord Somebody or Other.¹ After enjoying a splendid collation, the newly married couple departed to their noble domain of Robledales in Aragon." And whoever speaks of the swallows may clearly say the same thing of the whole throng of birds which had encamped both in the gardens of Nieva and in the immense pine groves which lined the banks of its river.

To be reckoned among the people most manifestly influenced by this spring breeze (leaving aside, of course, the Señorita de Delgado, with whom no one would dare to maintain any rivalry in the matter of sensations, sentiments, emotions, and all that refers to the life of the heart), was our acquaintance, Manolito Lopez. His worthy family noticed with grateful surprise, not only that the lad's character was manifestly softening, but likewise that the habits of orderliness and an inclination toward sedateness had sprung up, and were growing in him with unusual rapidity. This praiseworthy inclination

¹ Doña Fulana de Tal to Don Zutano de Cual.

was manifested in everything that pertained to the adornment of his person, but most particularly to that of his feet; a box of superior blacking every fortnight was not sufficient for the demands of his shoes, and he spent a large part of the morning and of his physical powers in making them shine like a looking-glass, and even thus he was not content: Manolito would not have been satisfied if anything less than the brilliancy of a Brazilian diamond, of all the jewels of the royal crowns of Europe, of the seas and the stars had been put into them. After giving the last finishing touch to his hair, Manolito always sallied forth in the amiable company of his glistening boots to promenade in front of the house of Elorza, and up the street and down the street he went all the time allowed him by his occupations, and also a good part of the time when he had no business to be there. The balconies of the house, as a rule, remained hermetically sealed; but Manolito, judging by the graceful gait which he affected as he passed, must have suspected that a pair of steady, love-stricken eyes were always observing him through the cracks. Once in a while the balconies were thrown open, giving a glimpse of Carmen, of Genoveva, of Adela, or some other servant, who looked at him without sufficient respect considering our young lad's age (fifteen years and three months) and his character. Very, very rarely likewise appeared Marta's pretty head. She looked out for an instant with an expression of indifference which, be it said for the sake of the truth, did not change into one of affection and tenderness at sight of Manolito, but certainly remained exactly as calm and serene as though our youth had no more personality than a column of the arcade, or the clock on the town-house, or the sign of the Café de la Estrella, or any other of the

inanimate objects whereon the girl's eyes rested. Manolito, for a few moments, felt as much disturbed as one who, sailing through the Arctic Ocean, should suddenly see an enormous iceberg coming down upon him; but soon he recovered his spirits, saying, for the encouragement of his heart, "What a sly one she is!" And though the balconies were immediately shut with a scornful scream, and remained closed all the day, yet Manolito did not cease to promenade back and promenade forth, fortified always in his conviction that through the interstices of the curtains a pair of ecstatic, love-softened eyes were launching at him a thousand passionate darts.

But where the spring held a more absolute and even despotic sway (always excepting, of course, the *Señorita de Delgado's* poetical soul) was the *Elorza* garden. There, without consulting in the slightest degree the will of the flexible *mimosas* or of the round *acacias* or of the dignified *catalpas* or of any other tree or shrub, flower or plant, however respectable, she began to clothe them all in green, carefully variegating their garments, making this one deep and dark, that one bright and dazzling, and the other pale and yellow, playing with them a sort of gay, original masquerade delightful for those to see who still persist in feeling affection for the works of nature. Above this habiliment there shone like decorations of honor many flowers, yellow, white, blue, or pink, quick to fill the ambient air with the sweet perfumes stored up in their hearts. The garden was unusually extensive, stretching out from the plaza where *Don Mariano's* mansion was built to the quay on one side, and on the other to the farthest houses of the town. And whether because it was not very easy to take the most perfect care of such a large piece of ground, or because *Don Mariano as a man*

of taste did not wish to impose upon Nature his own law, by establishing in her demesne a tyrannical system of geometrical crosses and lines, at any rate it offered all the lawless vigor, the exuberance, and the spontaneity, which it is not customary to find any longer except in provincial gardens managed according to a broad and tolerant Spanish fashion. The paths, though originally laid out in straight lines according to the style in vogue at the time when they were first designed, were now fluctuating, thanks to the growing up or disappearance of quince-tree, boxwood, or rose hedges. The trees in many places enclosed these paths with a thicket, giving them an air of long mystery, which, according to amateurs, is the greatest charm of gardens, and I appeal to the testimony of all ardent and elevated souls, particularly to the Señorita de Delgado. Back of the trees, through the hedges, could be seen a stone faun or satyr, discolored by great green spots on the muscular shoulders, spurting water from mouth and nostrils; in this agreeable occupation its whole life had been spent. Flowers in the Elorza garden did not possess those inordinate privileges which they are wont to obtain in flashy parks of modern times, but a number of succulent vegetables had established themselves on a footing of equality with them. At the side of a group or clump of dahlias grew an asparagus-bed, and within sight of a splendid bunch of *canna indica* and *calladium* flourished a thicket of artichokes and a bed of Alsatian cabbages. And why not? However indisputable the superiority of flowers may be, we must not deny to vegetables æsthetic qualities worthy of the consideration and respect of French gardeners, who at the present time have declared a merciless war upon them. Perhaps they consider that if vegetables are banished from

parks, they bury prose forever and have poetry only left, according to the example of those ancient novelists who did not dare to show their heroes and heroines in the act of eating for fear of soiling or tarnishing them. In one of the angles there was a great storehouse where were piled old furniture from the house, a number of broken-down carriages, the gardening utensils, and other things. The whole garden was surrounded by a wall of considerable thickness and elevation, over which climbed ivy and honeysuckle cautiously letting their leaves peer over the top, like two rogues coming in to rob fruit and get away before they should be discovered by the gardener. Over one of the faces of the wall arose the masts of the vessels at the quay, which with their multitudinous cordage enlacing and crossing in every direction, looked from a distance like monstrous spiders. A great gate barred with iron led from the garden to the quay.

The younger daughter of the proprietor of this garden found herself in it one morning culling flowers with a pair of shears suspended from her belt, and afterwards placing them very daintily in a small osier basket. She went about taking them now from this side and now from that, seeming at times to ponder before some, leaving them untouched to go straightway to others, and then coming back to them, thus endlessly meandering in every direction with hesitating step. She was so immersed in the depths of some combination for her bouquet that she allowed herself to be pitilessly burned by the sun, more splendid in his anger and pride than was his wont. Since we last saw her, a slight change not easy to define had taken place in her figure. She had just finished her fourteenth year. Her physical development, always exuberant and vigorous, had taken a sudden start during

the last three months, not causing her to grow at once tall and thin, as is apt to be the case with girls at this age, but bringing her beauty to a more ideal perfection. Marta was destined to be rather stout: nature had been giving the last touches to her figure, strengthening the line of her hips, rounding her arms, filling out her virginal bosom, and perfecting the oval of her face, without being willing, on any consideration, to grant her three inches more of stature, though she really needed them. On this account an Andalusian cavalry lieutenant, while saying something in her praise and dispraise in a game of forfeits, recently declared, "You are very charming, but your roundness is alarming."¹ And this had given occasion for the friends of the house to call her in fun *la redondita* (the round), and to plague her continually with the Andalusian rhyme. The expression of her face was as placid, grave, and as gentle as before. Nevertheless, her great black eyes, calm and liquid, which, as we have said, used to present a certain strange immobility, such as is seen in those suffering from gutta serena, acquired a movement so gentle and sweet that one of the De Ciudad girls, the very one who had pointed her out to the engineer Suárez, could not help exclaiming the other night, —

"Don't you see how sweet Martita is looking!"

"Certainly," replied the engineer, "that girl seems to caress you with her eyes when she looks."

At the same time they inclined to grow liquid, which still more increased their brilliancy and gentleness. At this particular moment she wore a dark violet dress, extremely snug and well fitted to her body, and, although at her earnest request it had been made a little longer than before, still, as she stooped over to cut the flowers,

¹ *Ez uzté mu bonita, pero ez uzté mu redondita.*

it allowed more than a glimpse to be seen of a pair of beautiful, well rounded ankles, comparable with the arms which Ricardo had admired.

After she had cut as many flowers as she wanted, she sat on a stone bench in the shade, and placing the basket by her side and taking out a ball of thread, proceeded, with great calmness, to make a nosegay. First she took a magnificent white tea-rose, and pulled off all its thorns, tying around it instead some leaves of althea. As she reached this stage in her operation, Ricardo made his appearance. Marta raised her head, hearing his steps, and quickly dropped it again, continuing her work.

"I have been hunting for you, Martita."

"What for?"

"Nothing . . . only to see you . . . Is that a little thing?"

"If that's all, it seems to me a very little thing; yes!"

"Perhaps you don't want me to see you?"

"I didn't say so . . . but as it hasn't been twenty-four hours since you got home . . ."

"Well, at any rate I wanted to see you."

Marta said nothing, and kept on with her task, placing around the rose and in the althea three pansies. Ricardo also had changed a little since the last time that we saw him. His face had grown somewhat thinner, and in place of its ordinary expression of contentment had come another as of fatigue sometimes approximating to gloom and bitterness. Unquestionably he had not been very happy during the last months, and we know very well that he had no good reason for being. The perpetual struggle which he had to sustain with Maria's scruples, and the sincere or simulated coldness which he saw in her, caused a steady, dull discomfort which embittered his existence. The brief

moments when he succeeded in talking with his beloved, instead of being brightened by the sweet expressions of love, were generally spent in bickerings and recriminations, or at least in long exhortations on one side and the other, — Ricardo trying to prove to Maria that her pious practices were an exaggeration incompatible with human nature; Maria urging Ricardo to abandon the frivolities of the world and enter upon the road of virtue, which is that of salvation.

After he had silently watched Marta's work a moment, he asked her, —

“Whom is that bouquet for?”

“For Maria, who wants to begin her flowers for the Virgin this evening. She asked me to make two, and I keep one in the house.”

A flash of joy passed through the young man's eyes at the mention of his sweetheart's name, and he began to take an interest in the formation of the nosegay. Marta noticed particularly her future brother's joy and interest. Between the three pansies she placed three pinks, — one red, one rose-colored, and the other white. Then she took a number of leaves of sweet marjoram and rose, and tied up with them the growing bouquet; thereupon she placed all around it a row of marguerites, alternating the colors, — purple, white, blue, and mottled.

“Now, you ought to put in some pinks,” added Ricardo, with the boldness of ignorance.

“Hush, Ricardo, you don't know what you are talking about . . . Now you want a filling of sweet marjoram and althea, so that the marguerites may have a background . . . Flowers must be loose and not touch each other, so that each may preserve its form in the bunch . . . Do you see? . . . Now a row of roses can be added without fear of crushi

the marguerites . . . a white one, then a red one . . . a white one . . . another red one . . . there ! that'll do !”

The thread unrolled between her fingers, gently binding the flowers together ; the nosegay went on assuming a pyramidal form very well proportioned. Ricardo, looking into the basket, saw some extremely bright-colored geraniums, and cried out, —

“Oh, how lovely those geraniums are ! . . . Such a bright color ought to become you, Martita ; put one in your hair.”

The girl, without more ado, took the one that he offered her, and stuck it in her dark locks above her ear. This combination of red and black, which is vulgar, as all girls know, appeared more harmonious than ordinarily, through the exceptional intensity not only of the black, but of the red. The geranium, on being translated to that position, seemed to have fulfilled its destiny on earth, or to have realized its essence, as my friend Homobono Pereda, shining with more beauty and satisfaction than ever, would say. Ricardo contemplated Marta's head with genuine admiration, while an innocent smile of triumph hovered over her lips and in her eyes.

Around the roses she placed, instead of the green setting of sweet marjoram and althea, another of white and blue violets, and next a row of geraniums of all colors, combining them exquisitely. The bouquet was finished. To add a crowning grace she put in a few handfuls of thyme, arranging them in such a way that they might serve as a support. The flowers, all artistically combined, appeared loose, each one showing its own individuality, or, as my friend Homobono would add, perfectly united in the whole.

Marta lifted the nosegay up, saying, with childish delight, —

"Isn't that fine! . . . isn't that fine!"

"Admirable! . . . admirable!" cried Ricardo, and in the height of his enthusiasm he took the nosegay, waved it several times, and then laying it down in the basket, seized the girl's hand and lifted it to his lips.

Marta grew as scarlet as the geranium that she wore in her hair, and snatched her hand away. Ricardo looked at her with a mischievous smile, and said:—

"What's does this mean, señorita, what does this mean? You are ashamed to have any one kiss your hand, when it isn't four months since we all kissed you on the cheek? That won't do . . . that won't do at all . . ."

And forcibly seizing her two hands he began to shower kisses on them without stopping, until he thought he felt something strange on his head, and lifted it. Marta was in tears. The young man's surprise was so great that he dropped her hands without saying a word. The girl hid her face in them, and began to sob with keen pain.

"Martita, what is it? What is the matter with you?" he asked, thoroughly terrified, stooping down to look into her face.

"Nothing! nothing! . . . Leave me . . ."

"But what are you crying about? . . . Have I hurt you? Have I offended you?"

"No, no! . . . Leave me, Ricardo . . . leave me, for Heaven's sake!"

And jumping from the bench, she started to run toward the house, wiping her eyes. Ricardo grew more and more surprised, as he saw her disappearing, and he stayed some time at the bench, trying in vain to explain the girl's behavior. Then he got up, and began to promenade in the garden. In a short time he had entirely forgotten Marta's tears; more painful memories came to

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disturb his mind and absorb his attention. An hour, at least, he spent in walking up and down the park, thinking about them, until at last, as he passed in front of the bench where he had been sitting with the girl, he noticed that her bouquet still remained in the basket, as she had left it, and thinking that it was not good for it to be there, he started with it to the house. He asked the first servant whom he met where the señorita was to be found.

"I think she is in the señora's room."

He turned his steps thither. At Doña Gertrudis's room he met Marta, who was doubtless bound on some errand for her mother. The girl, who still wore the red geranium in her hair, as soon as she saw him, gave him a sweet smile, and showed signs of being somewhat confused.

"Are you still vexed, Martita?" asked Ricardo, in a whisper.

"I wasn't vexed at all, Ricardo."

"But those tears?"

"I myself don't know what made me. . . . I have not been quite well for a few days, . . . and I cry without any reason."

"Then I am relieved in my heart, preciosa. You can't imagine how I felt at having caused you any pain!"

"Bah!"

"And how violently you wept! I believed that something really serious had occurred. . . . Has anything happened to grieve you to-day?"

"No, no; nothing at all. . . . I shall be right back. Good by."

The Marquis of Peñalta went into Doña Gertrudis's room, where at that time Don Mariano and Don Maximo were conversing together, neither of them showing in their faces any of the painful anguish, the pallor, and the fear

THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA.

ose who are witnessing the last agony of the dying; and this irritated Doña Gertrudis to such a degree that she would almost have taken delight in dying at that moment, for the sake of giving them a scare. She was reclining, as usual, in her easy-chair, her feet and legs wrapt up in a magnificent mountain goat-skin, casting looks of bitter desolation, now at the ceiling, and now at a cup of milk which she held in her hand. From time to time she carried it to her lips, and swallowed a portion of its contents, thereupon lifting her eyes, and exclaiming inwardly, "My God, may this cup pass from me!" Again and again she looked at her persecutors with ineffable serenity, saying, in a touching manner, that if God forgave their cruelty, she, for her part, did not find it hard to grant them a full and generous pardon, though she greatly doubted whether the Supreme Creator would grant it.

Ricardo sat down near the persecutors, without any ceremony, for that very morning he had had the opportunity of spending a good hour over Doña Gertrudis's nerves. She, considering that whoever has to do with sinners is prone to fall into sin, included him in advance in the universal and liberal amnesty which she had declared in favor of those who offended her.

"I would never permit either traitorous periodicals like *El Tradición*, or magistrates who would not obey the government punctually and unconditionally, Don Maximino."

"I agree with you up to a certain point; yet we are ourselves in a time of conflict, and it is necessary to proceed by exceptional measures. But you will not deny that, in a normal state of things, liberty —"

"Liberty and not license! . . . Liberty to work

that's the only kind that we need. Roads, bridges, factories, land improvements, railways, and ports, that is all that our unfortunate nation asks for. . . . The liberty that you progressists are ambitious to get is liberty to starve to death. . . . When I consider that, if it had not been for *la gloriosa*, our railway would have been at point of completion, such desperation seizes me that —”

“This is only a passing conclusion, Don ~~Maximo~~ ^{Maria} . . . You will see how very soon the rainbow of peace will shine!”

“Yes, yes . . . it is certainly raining now. . . . Have you read the leading article in *La Tradición*? [*La Tradición* was a Carlist journal, published in Nieva every Thursday.] Then, when you read it, you will see what rainbows the partisans of the Church and the throne are getting ready for us. . . .”

“Is it very strong?”

“It's a trifling thing! . . . It says that all good Catholics ought to take arms to exterminate the horde of the impious and ruffianly who govern us to-day. . . .”

At this moment Marta entered the room. As she passed in front of Ricardo, he took her by the hand, and obliged her to sit on his knees, giving her a speechless look of tenderness with his eyes, without losing any of the conversation. The girl sat down without resistance, and likewise listened in silence.

“But does it really say that?” asked Don Maximo.

“It certainly does. . . . Read it for yourself, and you will be edified. . . . In my opinion the Carlists are meditating and even plotting some *coup de main*. The general commander is taking too little care of this region, and is carrying off all the forces to drive the guerillas from the highlands. . . . The factory always requires a strong

garrison for what might happen . . . It is a prize coveted by them."

"I don't believe that they would ever dare to make any attempt in that direction. And except that the señor marqués says . . ."

Ricardo did not catch Don Maximo's last words, for, with an affectionate smile, he was saluting Maria, who at that moment came in. After she had sat down near Doña Gertrudis, and exchanged a look or two with him, he remembered the remark that had been directed to him.

"What did you say Don Maximo?"

"That I don't believe the Carlists have any intentions against the factory . . . It would be a ridiculous undertaking."

"Oh, no indeed! Not so ridiculous as you imagine, Don Maximo . . . This very day, with the small garrison which we have there, it would not be impossible or very difficult to take it by surprise . . . How many times I have thought, when on guard at night, that thirty decided men might get the better of me! If they succeeded in procuring a foothold inside, the thirty would be settled, you may believe . . ."

"Do you hear what he says, you stubborn man? do you hear him? Now you shall see how we must look out for our powder magazine, now that thunderbolts and meteors are falling. But listen to one thing, Ricardo, why don't you utilize for the defence of the factory the last advances made in electric lighting?"

"How?"

"I should suggest that if a number of electric lamps were put in different parts of it, which the officer on guard could set going by simply pressing a button, all danger of a surprise could easily be avoided; and if at

the same time a goodly number of heavy bells were set up, likewise worked by electricity, which would give an instant alarm in the city and wake the workmen, who for the most part live near . . . Martita! what's the matter?" he exclaimed, suddenly breaking off the thread of his discourse.

All hastened to her assistance. The girl, who was still seated on Ricardo's knees, had grown pale without any one noticing it. When Don Mariano casually glanced at her, she was white as a sheet of paper.

"What is it, my daughter?"

"What is the matter, Martita?"

"I don't feel quite well. Give me a glass of water." Maria ran to get it for her. Don Maximo felt of her pulse and said, —

"It's only a little giddiness, which water will cure."

In point of fact, as soon as she drank the water, and had sat down on the sofa, she began to feel better, and in a few moments was perfectly well. The conversation went on.

CHAPTER IX.

EXCURSION TO EL MORAL AND THE ISLAND.

FOR a fortnight at least there had been talk of an excursion to El Moral and the island. During the spring the young ladies¹ who went to the parties at the house of the Elorzas had been anxious to form a capital with the products of the tax and lottery to defray the expenses. Don Mariano allowed them to do so, smiling roguishly every time that he was told the state of the funds; but when the time came which was fixed for the excursion, in presence of the whole tertulia, he took the handful of silver from the little box in which it was kept and handed it to the parish priest of Nieva to divide among the parishioners who most needed it.

"Why!" exclaimed the noble caballero at the same time, "is it not a hundred-fold better to spend this money in alleviating the hunger of one or two poor people than in a frivolous and unnecessary amusement?"

"Certainly, certainly," said the girls, putting on an expression which in truth did not give evidence of the purest delights of virtue and the joys of the righteous.

That evening there was very little talking, singing, or dancing at the Elorza tertulia. Virtue, stern by nature, does not approve of noisy demonstrations. The young people of both sexes expressed the deep, pure satisfaction with which their sacrifice had inspired them by an ineffable severity, making them demure and silent the most

¹ *tertulianas*.

the time, as though they were meditating deeply on some Gospel text. Great, therefore, must have been the displeasure felt by all when Don Mariano said to them at the last moment:—

“Ladies and gentlemen, Thursday, at eight o’clock in the morning, I should be greatly pleased to have you meet at the quay, properly provided with hats, parasols, wraps, and so forth and so forth. Nothing is more likely than that the sailors of my *falúa* will be anxious to take us down to El Moral, and, as you well know, it wouldn’t be polite to disappoint them.”

The tertulia deplored this determination which deprived them of making a sacrifice for the universal brotherhood, and manifested it with a running fire of laughter, remarks, and disorderly movements: “What a man Don Mariano is!” “He always has to be playing these jokes!” “Thursday, Thursday!” “What engagement have I for Thursday? Oh, none, I believe.” “Must we take water-proofs?” “I think cloaks will be enough.” And so on.

And in fact, on Thursday at eight o’clock in the morning, Don Mariano’s launch and the quarantine boat, both clean and adorned like damsels on a fête-day, were impatiently waiting for the people, tossing side by side in the slip by the quay. Four sailors in each were making the final arrangements, from time to time casting inquiring glances now at the river, now at the streets which led from the quay. The passengers were not in sight, and the tide had already gone down two feet and a half. One of the sailors expressed his dislike of tardiness in a rough voice which was far enough from fashionable. At last appeared a variegated group of women and men among whom straw hats and red cloaks predominated, and the old sea-dog who had just been swearing like a

pirate blasphemed once more out of pure satisfaction, and put down a gang-plank between the dock and the *falúa* for the people to cross on. The first to leap on board was Don Mariano. The boat gently tipped on one side when she received her master's weight, as though making him a loving bow. All the young ladies, including, of course, the Delgados, next came tripping on board, leaning on Don Mariano's strong hand: the gentlemen followed. When the first *falúa* was full, they began to load the second, and this was quickly accomplished. In the first, among other people of distinction, were the two Misses de Delgado with their sister, the widow, who chaperoned them; the De Merinos with their brother Bonifacio, the most self-satisfied of all brothers; three or four officials from the factory, Don Mariano, Don Maximo, Martita, and Ricardo. Maria did not go because she would not break her vow to refrain from all recreation. Likewise Doña Gertrudis's indisposition prevented her from taking part in the excursion. In the second boat excellent accommodation was found by our friend, the fascinating, sprightly Señorita de Morí, under the watchful goggle eyes of the illustrious Isidorito. Likewise, we can distinguish among others a very pretty young girl named Rosario with whom the young swell at her side was not able to dance on the evening of the Elorza soirée, on account of the war proclaimed by the pianist against the German. The sailors were just going to cast off the lines for starting when from one of the *falúas* came a voice, asking,—

“But the De Ciudads?”

The De Ciudads were missing. Don Mariano and the quarantine doctor were in consternation at the mention of this name, which was such a guaranty of respectability. Before they had recovered from their consternation, there

appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the quay the six señoritas accompanied by their papa, their mamma, their engineer Suárez, and two small brothers. It was impossible to accommodate so many people in the two *falúas*; they had to hunt up another, and man it with the first sailors they could find, and thus precious time was lost. But at last, as everything in this world can be managed except death, the *De Ciudades* and their friends were well bestowed in a fishing-boat, and the captain of the quarantine gave the signal for the start. The twelve oars of the *falúas* began to strike the water in time with a gentle splash, like the arms of one stretching.

The level of the river was smooth, motionless, and bright as a mirror; the sun cast upon it wide, silvery spots towards the centre, and darker ones near the edges. The sky was covered by a delicate veil of clouds, making a splendid rival for the ladies' hats and parasols. Only a gentle breeze laden with the keen odor of pines on the shore came timidly kissing the soft back of the waters, and the no less soft and fresh necks of the ladies. It was not as yet a legitimate sea-breeze, but a hybrid kind¹ with the characteristics both of sea and land. The oars now put out all their agility, and with their blades lifted the crystal of the waters, causing fleeting, foamy whirlpools; all faces showed the healthful joy which is always caused by motion and the ever new and beautiful spectacle of nature. The girls, bending over the gunwale of the boat, delighted in taking off their rings and plunging their hands into the water, letting it pour with a murmur through their white fingers: they talked, they screamed, they laughed, and they exchanged greetings from one boat to the other. The young fellows spattered their

¹ *mestiza*.

faces with their canes or suddenly leaned to one side to scare them, taking great pleasure in their cries of desperation. All was noise and hubbub in the little squadron. As they came near El Moral, the marine characteristics of the breeze began to get the upper hand of the inland ones; it grew stronger, sometimes even blowing violently, as when the *falúas* passed by some glen made through the hills or sloping banks which shut in the river valley. The ribbons on the hats, the pennants on the mast-heads, handkerchiefs and neckties began to flutter violently. The voyagers felt the sweet deafness caused by the keen, salt-nurtured wind of the sea. A few aquatic birds of little account flew out from one shore and went flapping above the *falúas*, which was sufficient cause for Don Serapio, in a fit of enthusiasm for the sea, to get upon deck and, leaning over the flagstaff like one possessed, to sing the song which begins:—

“Al ver en la inmensa llanura del mar.

When o'er the mighty prairie of the sea,
I watch the sea-gulls in their rapid flight,
My soul is filled with envious thoughts,” etc.

If the river could blush, it would not have failed to do so on hearing itself called so hyperbolically the *mighty prairie*; but it took it in bad part, believing that there was some joke intended, and was seriously angry. At these events, the wind undertook to wreak vengeance for it by suddenly snatching off the inspired singer's sombrero and cutting short the current, not to say the torrent, of his voice. The *falúa* in the wake picked up the hat and restored it in a very water-soaked condition to its owner, who showed no more desire for the time being to continue apostrophizing the sea-gulls.

The little squadron stood nearer and nearer to the handful of houses at El Moral, distant from Nieva about a league and a half. The town kept growing more distant from our voyagers, offering them a beautiful spectacle. It was situated under the brow of a not very lofty mountain, decorated with green gardens and groups of laurel and orange trees on all sides; its white-walled houses seemed to have been placed in such a situation by the hand of an artist who believed in combining the advantages of nature so as to produce the æsthetic emotion, as a stage manager would say; the dazzling whiteness of the town stood out against the dark green of the mountain like a great patch of snow stretching down from the top; the silvery sheet of the river extending at its feet waited motionless and humble till it should melt into its bosom. The gentle, pine-clad hills which bordered the shores, and which our voyagers left one after the other, seemed like the bristling backs of huge, fantastic monsters.

The remarks made by one *falúa* to another gradually ceased. Each of the boats recovered self-jurisdiction, living for itself alone. Let us listen to what is said in them.

IN THE FLORZA FALÚA.

"I am well in years, Don Maximo, but I expect that my daughters are going to see this river perfectly channelled. The amount of water entering the mouth of the port would be sufficient to float vessels of the greatest draught, if it were not so spread out. The question is to utilize it. And how can this be done? Why, it must be done by force, by means of two parallel jetties, which should begin at the very bar and come up as far as Nieva. The water, both at ebb and flow, will pass between them with greater rapidity, working over the bottom until it

depression. Gradually the space included between the shore and the shores will be left dry, and can be easily reclaimed. To accomplish the drainage, all that is needed is to construct a clay dike against each of the jetties, and open large gates through which the water can flow out but not come in . . . Excuse my earnestness ! . . . I know well that this is not a work of months, but of many years ; still there is nothing impossible about it . . . Once reclaimed, these wide spaces would doubtless be utilized by the population of Nieva, even to the very bank of the beautiful canal, which would be constantly crowded with every kind of craft. The new city built on such a wide level would most certainly have its streets laid out at right angles, like those of the American cities, and magnificent wharves. The true port, however, cannot be here, but near the roadstead of Los Arenales, . . . very soon we shall be passing by it. It is a well-sheltered and extensive site, where a whole fleet could have stay-room . . . At present it is not very deep ; I am perfectly aware of that, but it has a sandy bottom, and you know that with the powerful dredging-machines which we have nowadays, in a very short time, it could be made two or three metres deeper . . . Then Nieva will be the most important part of El Cantabrico ; the larger part of our mineral products will be exported through it, for the dock at Sarrio is very small, and there is no chance to increase it ; instead of going to French watering-places to spend the summer, the Spaniards will come to these beautiful Northern Provinces, neglected to-day for lack of means of communication . . . How is Biarritz to be compared in spring with these fresh, delicious regions ? What sea-coast of Arcachón can enter into rivalry with ours at Miramar and Las Huelgas ? . . . ”

ON BOARD OF LA SANIDAD.

"Last night I slept splendidly, after a number of nights when I didn't close my eyes hardly at all," said the Señorita de Morí to her friend Rosario, who was seated near her . . . "I don't know what has been ailing me this long time . . . I feel nervous . . . My head aches when I get up . . . I think I need a tonic."

"Sometimes you need to give the heart a tonic, señorita," said Isidorito, boldly, with his face frightfully contracted by a smile.

"I didn't know that the apothecary shops furnished tonics for the heart," replied the young lady, with a scornful gesture, directing her words to Rosario.

"Oh, no, señorita; not in the apothecary shops; the heart is not cured by the preparations of ordinary therapeutics, nor by any formulas of the pharmacopœia, for it has, apart from its physical nature, which is not unlike the rest of the viscera, another nature purely spiritual as we are generally accustomed to speak of it, and this cannot be treated except by moral medicaments. When I said that sometimes you need to give your heart a tonic, I meant to indicate that possibly it would be good for you to drive away certain preoccupations of an amorous character, which often are wont to affect it."

"I am not troubled by these *preoccupations* of which you speak, nor do I intend to have them at present, God helping me," replied the señorita with the same air of dissatisfaction as before, and addressing herself only to Rosario.

"You cannot affirm that in such a categorical manner."

"And why not?"

"For in the state in which you find yourself it is very

difficult, not to say impossible, to fathom all the profundities of the spirit and scrutinize all of its hiding-places. Frequently impressions make their way into our souls in a surreptitious manner without our taking note of it; they begin by being vague and fugitive, and for that very reason pass without being observed; but slowly they go on taking shape, growing in strength, and finally they conquer the individual and rule him at their will. Then they pass into the category of the passions."

"But I know perfectly well what *I* feel and what I don't feel."

"Oh, no, señorita; allow me to contradict you. You cannot know."

"Man, for goodness' sake! Can't I know what I feel?"

"Why, then, you must know that —"

"Perhaps I know better than you do. Self-observation, according to all the philosophers and moralists, is more difficult than to observe others, and there are very few who are able to reach to it. On the other hand, youth is little prone to reflection, and above all women are incapable of taking perfect account of their inclinations and of the vague emotions passing through their hearts."

"Look you! women are as God created them, and so are men."

"I don't doubt it; but God has so created them, with a sensitive capacity (if I may express myself in this way) more quick and delicate than that of men. It may be said that they are born exclusively for love, and that love ought to fill the measure of their existence. Love and the consequences which arise from love constitute the first end of conjugal union or, in other words, matrimony. Thus it has been established in all legislative codes, and particularly in the canonical, which is the purest fountain

of all. Woman consequently works more under the impulse of fancy and sentiment than of reason . . .”

“Heavens! how much Isidorito knows about us poor women!” exclaimed the Señorita de Morí, in a tone between anger and jest.

The district attorney was somewhat crushed, but at length he went on with his remarks, without ceasing the pseudo-smile which afflicted his face.

“Love being, for the reason above given, the most powerful, not to say the only, motive of a woman’s life, there is nothing wonderful in the supposition that a young lady like you may find herself agitated by this omnipotent feeling, and paying tribute to what constitutes an irrecusable law of life. You may now see how I was not out of the way when I affirmed that sometimes it is necessary for you to give your heart a tonic or—and this is the same thing—alleviate it of some too grievous impression.”

“O my!¹ what a bore!” said the Señorita de Morí in a whisper; but she replied aloud, “Why, you are absolutely mistaken, Isidorito; nothing grieves me or disturbs me at present!”

“Allow me to doubt it.”

“You are welcome to doubt it; but I assure you that I have the best reason for knowing.”

“Certainly, according to all logic, although you may declare the contrary, yet there is no possibility of sustaining such an opinion; not only reason and good sense oppose it, but from the most superficial observation of the facts it results, first, that love is a natural and constant sentiment in young ladies; second, that you have no reasons for escaping from it; and third, that the fact

¹ *Ay Dios.*

of sleeping little and uneasily makes the supposition that you are in love a very reasonable one."

The Señorita de Morí shrugged her shoulders, made a scornful grimace with her lips, and without deigning to reply, resumed her conversation with her friend Rosario.

Isidorito had triumphed over his opponent as usual; for always the woman with whom he was conversing was in his eyes his opponent, and he believed in the necessity of involving her in the meshes of his logic, and of getting her close in his grasp, until he subdued her like a rebellious rival in the law. Thus he expected to win the admiration and respect of the feminine sex. But the feminine sex (be it said to its dishonor) not only did not admire Isidorito for his belligerent logic, for his sedateness, and for his vast legal knowledge, but it looked upon him with marked disfavor, and avoided his conversation as though it were a disgusting clatter. The Señorita de Morí, with whom he had carried on the most pugnacious argument on the nature of love and friendship, the sweets of remembrance, the bitternesses of forgetfulness, sympathy, and all else relating to the heart, in which he always came out instantly victorious, had learned to hate him like death. Consequently our wise youth was really more than a hundred leagues from the lovely heiress's three thousand duros income, while he believed that he could touch them with his finger-tips. His never-failing sedateness, his self-possessed and serene eloquence, his long-tailed coats, his ideas of order, and his legal diction had aroused against him a prejudice as cruel as it was unjustified.

IN THE DE CIUDAD FALÚA.

"Maria, Julia, Consuelo, just see how lovely the water feels when you put your hand in!"

"How lovely! how lovely!"

"You'll wet your clothes, Amparo!"

"See what cunning white feathers the water makes between the fingers, Suárez!"

"Splendid! . . . but you'll wet the sleeve of your dress."

"Wait a moment . . . I am going to tuck it up . . . There, that's good . . . Look! look! . . ."

"It still seems to me as though it would get wet . . . Tuck it up a little more."

"More?"

"Yes."

"But I shall show my whole arm!"

"What difference does that make?"

"Be sensible; it isn't the time to give one a cold . . . Now it seems to me all right . . . Uf! how cold this water is! . . . It isn't noticeable on the hands, but on your arms! Look! Look how it jumps up! . . . If you put your palm flat against the current, it runs clear up your arm. Don't you see how beautiful and clear it is to-day?"

"Speaking frankly, I will tell you," whispered the engineer in Amparo's ear, "that at this moment my attention is attracted more by your fair arm!"

"If you don't hush, you rogue, I shall spatter the water in your face," replied the girl, threatening him with her chaste vengeance."

"Though you should throw me into the river, I should still say so . . . I am an artist, above all things, as you well know . . . There is nothing so beautiful as the human form, . . . when it is beautiful; and that arm of yours stands comparison with the most perfect models of the sculptor's art."

"Come, come! don't be absurd! . . . My arm is like

any one else's. The main thing is, that it is beginning to feel cold . . . Whew! what water.¹ It seemed so warm at first! . . . And how it keeps on growing colder and colder, till at last it chills one to the bone! . . ."

"Take it out, take it out . . . we must dry it!"

And Amparito obeyed, taking her arm out of the water, and innocently holding it towards the engineer, who began to wipe it with his handkerchief, lavishing upon it delicate attentions, and saying, at the same time:—

"But what a lovely arm you have, Amparito! How white! what soft skin! and how round it is, above all! . . . A woman's arm ought to be so, . . . round and slender, like that of the Venus di Medici . . . the arm ought to diminish gradually and symmetrically to the wrist . . . The truth is, with such an arm you ought to be worthy of being a sculptor's model . . . Well-formed women are scarce enough nowadays. To this is due the decay of sculpture, according to some critics . . . If there were many like you, this certainly could not be said . . . What an arm! what a lovely arm! . . . You can't imagine the pleasure I feel in touching it with my hand . . ."

The engineer, as he said this, suited the action to the word, and rubbed it so hard that Señor de Ciudad, who, with grim eyes, was watching the operation from the bow, could not help exclaiming, in an angry tone,—

"Amparo, please pull down your sleeve . . . You most foolish girl!"


The girl blushed, and pulled down her sleeve. The engineer, not being able to evolve his artistic theories with his model in sight, renounced, for some time, the use of speech.

¹ *Caramba con el agua.*

The *falúas* were now over against the Arenales. The sun had succeeded in making a few rifts in the veil of cloud, and was threatening, sooner or later, to rend it in pieces. The pencil of rays which penetrated through these rifts, and fell on the sand-hills, made them gleam like enormous flakes of gold, shedding their splendors over the whole breadth of the watery sheet; occasionally, when the sunbeams were cut off a moment by the interposition of some cloud, the splendors paled, and the sand assumed the grayish or gilded shades of webs of yellow silk. The voyagers all agreed that those sand wastes gave a very good idea of the deserts of Africa; and Don Mariano expressed his opinion that it would be very easy to control the sand by means of feather-grass and other suitable vegetation, and soon convert them into magnificent groves of pines.

The valley, which in the midst of the way opened out till it acquired considerable breadth, became narrower again as it neared El Moral. The waters became more restless, revealing the proximity of the sea; the hills, protecting the village with their stony slopes and their bare, melancholy tops, likewise made it evident. The breath of the monster began to be felt, blowing freshly and proudly through the narrow mouth of the river; and far away could be heard the low, portentous beating of his heart. The *falúas* now and then pitched upon patches of foam, which came rolling over the water, like tatters torn from the mantle of some god who had been battling all the night with the monsters of the ocean.

They reached El Moral. Don Mariano had prepared for them a delicious luncheon in a large ware-house, which he owned there, and the numerous company gave one more proof that the sea breezes are the most excellent stimulant



for the appetite. When they had done good justice to it, and rested a little while, they re-embarked to continue their excursion. A short distance from El Moral was the mouth of the harbor from which they put out to sea, leaving on the starboard quarter the lighthouse tower set on a bluff. The sailors dropped their oars and hoisted the sails to take advantage of the fresh north-east wind which forced them ahead. It was eleven o'clock in the forenoon. The cloud veil had entirely vanished down the horizon, leaving in view a beautiful, diaphanous blue sky wherein the sun swam haughty and brilliant as never before. The sea stretched out before our voyagers' eyes like one enormous, measureless blue plain, shutting in on all sides the celestial vault to collect its light and its harmony. Above this azure plain the luminous disk of the sun made a wide path of shining silver peopled with tremulous, sparkling gleams and extending in a direct line towards the east. In each one of the crests which the breeze raised on the water the sunbeams left a fugitive, vivid light which, on mingling and joining with the rest in an incessant dance, seemed like the monstrous, fantastic ebullition of the treasures hidden in the depths of the ocean. The voyagers followed that silvery path with their gaze, and did not open their lips for a long time, enjoying the deeply fine and solemn impression which the sea always makes on the mind. The outlines of the island, dimmed and confused by the excess of light, stood out opposite the very mouth of the river, about five miles from the coast. Around it could be seen great flocculent shreds of foam which alternately grew and narrowed down again, girdling it with a white belt of lace-work. The wind blew strong, but with generous benignity, for it had plenty of room to exercise its

powers. The three *falúas*, with sails spread, cut through the water, one behind the other, like so many sea-gulls chasing them. The cordage whistled, the masts creaked in the holes imprisoning them, and the sails bellied under the breath of the breeze which tipped the boats more than was relished by the ladies. The water, as it passed, broke into foam, making a musical murmur against the bow, and sliding along on both sides with a rustle like the unrolling of silk.

Don Serapio felt himself attacked by a maritime ecstasy, and, holding his hat in one hand and gesticulating dramatically with the other, he sang :—

“How blessed that man who can number
His joys on the ocean;
For the billows rock him to slumber
With somnolent motion.”

The almost imperceptible voice of the proprietor of the canning-factory had the honor of joining in with the eternal concert of the seas, like one of so many noises of tumbling billows or rattling pebbles. The wind would not deign to carry it twenty yards away.

The *falúas*, as they glided out on the swelling breasts of the waves, mounted and fell with a gentle, lazy motion which at first was delightful to the passengers. They began to sway, softly closing their eyes with a smile of delicious content, surrendering themselves in full to the vague, poetic dreams awakened in their hearts by the sea. Who would have said, alas ! that those who were dreaming so comfortably, and rejoicing in a smiling world of gentle fancies and gilded illusions, would be seen in a few minutes with heads sadly bent over the sea, necks leaning on the gunwale, as though it were a chop-

ping-block, faces livid and eyes fixed upon the water, as though they were trying to sound the secret arcana of the ocean! Oh terrible fickleness of human affairs!

But what was taking place in the quarantine boat, that she should come about and leave her companions? An unforeseen contingency, and certainly one most annoying. Isidorito's breakfast had played him false. Hardly were they clear of El Moral when he began to be pale and silent, though no one noticed it; but at last the pallor increased to such a degree that he really looked like a corpse. Then it was suspected that he was seasick, and they advised him to put his fingers in his mouth; but the municipal attorney, very thoroughly acquainted with the tragedy at that moment enacting in his stomach, would not do any such thing, and begged humbly that, if it were possible, they should turn about and leave him on shore. All were stupefied at this proposition, and the *falúa* continued on her swift course, as though she had not heard. But, after a time, Isidorito propounded it in a still more energetic manner, and the sailors were obliged to reply that, though it was not impossible, still, to return to shore would cost them an hour's time. Another interval passed. Isidorito got up suddenly, with his face convulsed, and, extending his right hand toward the shore, he exclaimed with a voice of mighty anguish, "Turn around, turn around for God's sake, or I shall jump overboard into the water!" Then the *falúa*, not wanting to be an accomplice in a suicide, veered around, dropped sail, and putting out oars, began to make its way, as quick as possible to the nearest point on the shore. There are reasons, however, for believing that the distinguished legal man did not reach land in sufficient time. The *Señor de Morí* felt sufficiently avenged for the many annoyances which his inflexible logic had occasioned her.

CHAPTER X.

THE EXCURSION CONTINUED.

MEANTIME the ocean, indifferent to the laughter and the discomfort of those petty insects which skim over its burnished surface, reflected the fire of the sun over all its immensity, enjoying this lofty pleasure with the same calmness as in the first days of the world. The light could wander freely over its humid surface, running leagues upon leagues in a second, shooting its blazes to the furthest confines of the horizon, or gathering them in a splendid bundle. It could sport over the foamy crests of its waves, or timidly kiss the diaphanous mirror of the waters, or spatter it with fine silver powder, or fall in a swoon with languid, voluptuous tremors, losing themselves amid the folds of the billows: nothing could change the solemn peace of his heart or cause him to utter a note lower or a note higher in the grandiose air in basso profundo which he has sung since the beginning of the world.

The outlines of the island now stood out with clearness, black and burnt as though they had just emerged from a fire. As they came nearer, the white belt, which from a distance seemed to girdle it, broke into a thousand separate pieces, a considerable distance from one another. The formidable roar as of multitudes fighting, chains dragging, and rocks crashing, came from that direction, announcing to our voyagers that they were approaching their destination. At the end of an hour they succeeded,

not without difficulty, in effecting a landing on its rock-bound shore; then they had to climb up by a narrow, perilous footway hollowed out of the rock, before they reached the solid, level land. The island did not deserve this name.¹ It was an islet two or three kilometers long, belonging to Don Mariano Elorza, who made use of it only for occasional hunting excursions, and for collecting a few hundred gulls' eggs from it every year. It was covered here and there with pines, but for the most part it was clad in furze, where hares and rabbits had their warrens: on nearly all sides it presented perpendicular cliffs to the sea, which beat incessantly against it, furiously rushing in and out of the hollows in the rocks everywhere abounding. Don Mariano had built in the centre a small house as a hunting-box which, little by little, he had provided with many conveniences. It contained only a large parlor, a dining-room, a few bedrooms, and the kitchen; but it was quite well furnished, and was surrounded by a small garden where a few shade-trees reluctantly grew.

While the dinner was in preparation and they were waiting for the quarantine *falúa*, which had gone to deposit Isidorito like a melancholy exile on a barren coast, the ladies and gentlemen scattered about, devoting themselves to hunting and fishing, according to the tastes and dispositions of each. Shots began to be heard here and there, showing that the rabbits, which had multiplied in geometrical progression, suffered the law of repression discovered by Malthus. The voyagers who had not bloodthirsty instincts made themselves comfortable on the moss at the edge of the cliffs, contemplating the horizon from quarter to quarter, where the sail of some

¹ *La Isla.*

bark was often seen. Others studied the flora, plucking flowers and entering into long discussions about the cultivation which would suit that soil and the products which it might give. When everything was arranged, Don Mariano sent word by his servants, and one after the other the guests made their way back to the house and entered the parlor, where a splendid table had been improvised, loaded with viands and flowers. It took much labor and sufficient noise to seat so many people, but at last it was accomplished, thanks to the activity of the master of the house, greatly aided by the young man with the banged hair, whom we had the honor of meeting on the evening of the *soirée*, celebrated in honor of Doña Gertrudis.

The feast was worthy of Amphitryon. No gastronomic refinement was lacking; everything was wisely provided by an imagination familiar with culinary subjects and, as some one at the table was moved to say with truth, "life on a desert island was not so unhappy as it was pictured in Robinson Crusoe and other books." Each plate had before it five or six glasses which two servants were commissioned to keep filling successively with different kinds of wine according to the courses served. No one will be surprised, therefore, that after dinner was over there were enthusiastic toasts preceded by most eloquent speeches and accompanied by shouts, bravos, and congratulations of all sorts to the orator. Don Maximo cut them short by a few phrases, ill enough expressed but very touching, referring to the brevity of human life, to the vanity of pleasures, to the recompense which we shall have for our sorrows in another world, and other supernal subjects. The orator ended by shedding copious tears stirred by such funereal thoughts. Nevertheless, there were some who said in an undertone that Don Maximo's

population was the least diverting that they had ever known. Then the engineer, Suárez, made a speech elegantly phrased and ornate, directed to emphasizing the importance enjoyed by woman in our civilization and the salutary changes which, thanks to her influence, had obtained in the manners of modern nations. He made a eulogy, as brilliant as it was finished, of her artistic abilities, declaring it to be much superior to man's. He likewise spoke of her physical perfections, enumerating them with great satisfaction, and he ended by toasting her unconditionally as the most beautiful and exquisite work of creation, as the eternal and sweet companion of man. The *Señoritas de Ciudad* clapped their hands. Thereupon Don Serapio got up and with rather unctious speech proposed in concrete terms that the brilliant assemblage who was hearkening to him should settle for good in the island, in order to populate it, and invited each one of those present to select as quickly as possible their partners. The fact that at the end of his invitation he tipped a mischievous and impudent wink at one of the maid-servants who was helping at table raised against him a tempest of hisses and interruptions. Not being able satisfactorily to explain his behavior, Don Serapio grew very angry and went out into the kitchen, where, after a short time, was heard a ringing box on his ears.

Next followed the toasts, growing constantly more fiery and tempestuous, so that nothing that was said could be heard. One of the most famous was Martita's. By the advice of Ricardo, who sat by her side, she had drunk three glasses of champagne and did not know what was going on. The poor girl, so reserved and silent by temperament, began to let her tongue have free course, directing very facetious sallies at all present, who received

them with rejoicing and applause. When a lady said that she was a little tipsy, she grew very serious and declared that she was only rather happy, which was nothing very strange considering that she was young. This repartee caused great laughter among the picnickers. When she was speaking, she kept fanning herself with her handkerchief. Her eyes, ordinarily so steady and serene, had acquired a strange loveliness and a malicious brilliancy which attracted the attention of Suárez, the engineer. The very timbre of her voice had notably altered, making it deeper and firmer. For the time being, she seemed like a woman in all the plenitude of her powers.

When they were tired of talking nonsense, Don Mariano had the tables removed from the parlor, so that the young people might dance. A piano, which had reached a dignified old age in that cloistered retreat, was called upon to mark the time of a mazurka with its cracked voice. As was to be expected, the dance from the first instant lost all ceremony and was converted into a whirlwind of hops, screams, and laughter. Marta, who was dancing with Ricardo, quickly said, —

“I can’t endure this heat! Don’t you want to go out into the fresh air for a little?”

“Let us go; I, too, am almost suffocated.”

When they were in the garden, she said to him, —

“If you will come with me, I will take you to a place which no one here knows anything about except papa and me; it is a beach hidden among the rocks; you don’t see it until you are on it . . . it is a lovely place.”

“If I like! you know well enough the love I have for landscapes, and above all for seascapes! How do you get to it?”

"Follow me . . . you shall see."

Marta started out toward a clump of pines situated not far from the house, and Ricardo followed her. The girl wore a marine blue dress with white lace trimmings, and she had on her head a straw hat with a wreath of red convolvulus.

"After we reach that grove, you are going to enjoy a surprise."

"Indeed?"

"Just wait and see!"

In fact, after they had reached the grove and had been walking some time in it, they came upon a grotto half covered up with trees and underbrush. Marta, without saying a word, entered it, and in two seconds disappeared from sight. Ricardo waited an instant in uncertainty and deep surprise; but a gay peal of laughter echoing from within startled him from his stupor.

"What does this mean? Don't you dare to come in, coward?"

"But, child, don't you see, you might get hurt!"

"Come in, come in, brave warrior!"

"Very well . . . seeing that you have set the example."

When he joined Marta, he found that the grotto was quite large and had a sandy floor.

"Oh, I didn't suppose it was so large and comfortable!"

"Good; now follow me."

"Where?"

"How inquisitive you are! . . . You shall see, man, you shall see for yourself."

She entered further into the cave, which kept growing darker and darker, and Ricardo followed, not taking his eyes from her for fear she should fall or stumble

upon some obstacle. After some little time the ~~where~~ silhouette vanished in the gloomy depths of the cavern, and Ricardo found himself in real darkness.

"Don't be worried; follow me, and nothing will happen to you. I will be talking all the time, so you can walk in the direction of my voice . . . If you want me to give you my hand, I will . . . No? . . . very well, but don't fall far behind . . . In a very short time you will begin to descend, but it is a gentle slope . . . Do you see? . . . Don't grumble against the footing . . . Still, if one should fall, it would not do much harm . . . We shall be in the light soon . . . Be careful; turn to the right, for the path here makes a bend . . . There, we have light at last!"

A luminous point was, in fact, visible below our young friend's feet a hundred yards distant. Marta's silhouette again emerged from the darkness and stood out against the niggardly light which entered through the aperture.

A long, dull murmur was audible in the cave, hinting at the proximity of the ocean. In a few moments they came out into the light.

Ricardo was in ecstasies over the sight which met his eyes. They stood facing the sea in the midst of a beach surrounded by very high, jagged crags. It seemed impossible to issue from it without getting wet by the waves, which came in majestic and sonorous, spreading out over its golden sands, festooning them with wreaths of foam. Our young people advanced toward the centre in silence, overcome with emotion, watching that mysterious retreat of the ocean, which seemed like a lovely hidden trysting-place where he came to tell his deepest secrets to the earth. The sky of the clearest azure reflected on the sandy floor which sloped toward the sea with a gentle incline; months

Years often passed without the foot of man leaving imprint upon it. The lofty, black, eroded walls, shutting in the beach with their semicircle, threw a melancholy silence upon it; only the cry of some sea-bird flitting from one crag to another, disturbed the eternal, mysterious monologue of the ocean.

Ricardo and Marta continued slowly drawing nearer the water, still under the spell of reverence and admiration. As they advanced, the sand grew smoother and smoother; the prints of their feet immediately filled with water. Coming still nearer, they noticed that the waves increased, and that their curling volutes at the moment of breaking would cover them up if they could get them in their power. They came in toward them solid, stately, imposing, as though they were certain to carry them off and bury them forever amid their folds; but five or six yards away they fell to the ground, expressing their disappointment with a tremendous, prolonged roar; the torrents of foam which issued from their destruction came spreading up and leaping on the sand to kiss their feet.

After considerable time of silent contemplation, Marta began to feel disturbed; she imagined that she noticed in them a constantly increasing desire to get hold of her, and that they expressed their longing with angry, desperate cries. She stepped back a little and seized Ricardo's hand, without confessing to him the foolish fear that had taken possession of her; she imagined that the sheet of foam sent up by the waves, instead of kissing her feet, was trying to bite them; that as it gathered itself up again with gigantic eagerness, it attracted her against her will, to carry her away no one knows whither.

"Doesn't it seem to you that we are going too close to the waves, Ricardo?"

"Do you think perhaps they'll come up as far as where you are?"

"I don't know . . . but it seems to me as though we were sliding down insensibly . . . and that they would get hold of us at last."

"Don't you be alarmed, preciosa," said he, throwing his arm around her shoulder and gently drawing her to him; "neither are the waves coming up to us, nor are we going down to them . . . Are you afraid to die?"

"Oh, no, not now!" exclaimed the girl, in a voice scarcely audible, and pressing closer to her friend.

Ricardo did not hear this exclamation; he was attentively watching the passage of a steamboat which was passing down the horizon, belching forth its black column of smoke.

After a time he felt like renewing the theme.

"Are you really afraid of death? Oh, you are well off . . . To-day the world has in store for you its most seductive smiles . . . not a single cloud obscures the heaven of your life. God grant you may never come to desire it!"

"And are you afraid to die? tell me!"

"Sometimes I am, and sometimes I am not."

"At this moment are you?"

"Oh! how funny you are!" exclaimed the young fellow, turning his smiling face towards her. "No, not at this moment, certainly not."

"Why not?"

"Because, if the sea should carry us away, we two should die together; and going in such charming company, what would it matter to me leaving this world?"

The girl looked at him steadily for a moment. Over the young man's lips hovered a gallant but somewhat condescending smile. She abruptly tore herself from him,

and turning her back, began to walk up and down on the beach skirting the dominions of the waves.

The steamship was just hiding behind one of the headlands like a fantastic warrior, walking through the water until only the plume of his helmet was visible. When it had disappeared, Ricardo joined his future sister, who seemed not to notice his presence, so absorbed was she in contemplation of the ocean; yet after a moment she suddenly turned around, and said, —

“Do you dare to go with me to the point which extends out there at the right?”

“I have no objection, but I warn you that it’s flood tide, and that that point will be surrounded by water before the end of an hour.”

“No matter; we have time enough to go to it.”

Leaping and balancing over the rocks along the shore, which were full of pools and lined with seaweed, whereon they ran great risk of slipping, they reached the point far out in the sea.

“Let us sit down,” said Marta. “Sometimes the sea comes up as far as this, doesn’t it?”

Ricardo sat beside her, and both looked at the humid plain extending at their feet. Near them it was dark green in color; farther away it was blue; then in the centre the great silvery spot was still resplendent with vivid scintillations reflecting the fiery disk of the sun. From the liquid bosom of the boundless deep arose a solemn but seductive music, which began to sound like a paternal caress in the ears of our young friends. The great desert of water sang and vibrated in its spaces like the eternal instrument of the Creator. The breeze coming from the waves brought a refreshing coolness to their temples and cheeks; it was a keen, powerful breath,

swelling their hearts and filling them with vague, exalted feelings.

Neither of them spoke. They enjoyed the contemplation of ocean's majesty and grandeur, with a humble sense of their own insignificance, and with a vague longing to share in its divine, immortal power. Their eyes followed again and again unweariedly along the fluctuating line of the horizon which revealed to them other spaces, endless and luminous. Without noticing it, by an instinctive movement they had again drawn nearer to each other as though they had some fear of the monster roaring at their feet. Ricardo had laid one arm around the young girl's waist, and held her gently as if to defend her from some danger.

At the end of a long time, Marta turned her kindled face toward him and said, with trembling voice, —

“Ricardo, will you let me lean my head on your breast? I feel like weeping!”

Ricardo looked at her in surprise, and drawing her gently toward him, laid her head on his knee. The girl thanked him with a smile.

The waters beat upon the point where they were, spattering them with spray, and ceaselessly pouring in and out of the deep caves of the rocks, which seemed hollow, like a house. The rivers tumbling over them awoke strange, confused murmurs within, seeming sometimes like the far-off echoes of a thunder-clap, again like the deep rumbling of an organ.

Marta, with her head resting on the young man's knee and her face turned to the sky, allowed her great, liquid eyes to roam around the azure vault, with ears attent to the deep murmurs sounding beneath her. The fresh sea breeze had not yet succeeded in cooling her burning cheeks.

"Hark!" she said, after a little; "don't you hear it?"

"What?"

"Don't you hear, amid the roar of the water, something like a lament?"

Ricardo listened a moment.

"I don't hear anything."

"No; now it has stopped; wait a while . . . Now don't you hear it? . . . Yes, yes, there's no doubt about it . . . there's some one weeping in the hollows of this rock . . ."

"Don't be worried, tonta; it's the surf that makes those strange noises . . . Do you want me to go down and see if there's any one in there?"

"No! no!" she exclaimed, eagerly; "stay quiet . . . If you should move, it would disturb me greatly . . ."

The great spot of silver kept extending further over the circuit of the ocean, but it began to grow pale. The sun was rapidly journeying toward the horizon, in majestic calm, without a cloud to accompany him, wrapt in a gold and red vapor, which gradually melted, till it was completely lost in the clear blue of the sky. The point where the sun were, likewise stretched its shadow over the water, the dark green of which, little by little, grew into black. The roaring of the waves became muffled, and the breeze died away softly, like the indolent breathing of one about to go to sleep. An august, soul-stirring silence began to come from the bosom of the waters. In the caverns of the rock Marta no longer perceived the mournful cry which had frightened her; and the thunders and mumblings had been slowly changing into a soft and languid *glu glu*.

"Are you going to sleep?" asked Ricardo again.

"I have told you once that I don't care to go to sleep. I am so happy to be awake! . . . He who sleeps doesn't suffer, but neither does he enjoy . . . It is good to sleep

only when one has sweet dreams, and I almost never have them . . . Look, Ricardo ; it seems to me now that I am asleep and dreaming . . . You look so strange to me ! I see the sky below, and the sea above ; your head is bathed in a blue mist ; . . . when you move, it seems as though the vault covering us swung to and fro ; when you speak, your voice seems to come out of the depths of the sea . . . Don't shut your eyes, for pity's sake ! how it makes me suffer ! I imagine that you are dead, and have left me here alone. Don't you see how wide open mine are ! Never did I want less to sleep than now . . . Hark ! put down your face a little nearer ; should you suffer much, if the sea were to rise slowly, and finally cover us up ?”

Ricardo trembled a little ; he cast a look about him, and saw that the water was ready to cut off the isthmus uniting them to the shore.

“ Come, we are almost surrounded by water already.”

“ Wait just a little . . . I have something to tell you . . . I am going to whisper it very low, so that no one shall hear it . . . no one but you . . . Ricardo, I should be glad if the sea would come up now, and bury us forever . . . Thus we should be eternally in the depths of the water ; you sitting, and I with my head on your lap, with eyes wide open . . . Then,—yes, I would dream at my ease ; and you would watch my sleep, would you not ? The waves would pass over our heads, and would come to tell us what is going on in the world . . . Those white and purple fishes, which sailors catch with hooks, would come noiselessly to visit us, and would let us smooth their silver scales with our hands. The seaweed would entwine at our feet, making soft cushions ; and when the sun rose, we should see him through the glassy water, larger and more beautiful, filtering his thousand-colored beams through it, and dazzling

us with his splendor! . . . Tell me, doesn't it tempt you? . . . doesn't it tempt you?"

• "Be quiet, Martita; you are delirious . . . Come along, the tide is rising."

"Wait a moment . . . We have been here an hour, and the wind hasn't cooled my cheeks . . . they are hotter than ever . . . No matter . . . I am comfortable . . . Do you want to do me a favor? . . . Listen! I must ask your forgiveness . . ."

• "What for?"

"For the scare I gave you the other day. Do you remember when we were making a nosegay together in the garden? . . . You wanted to kiss my hand, and I was so stupid that I took it in bad part, and began to cry . . . How surprised and disgusted you must have been! . . . I confess that I am a goose,¹ and don't deserve to have any one love me . . . However, you may believe me that I was not offended with you . . . I wept from sentiment . . . without knowing why . . . What reason had I to weep? You did not want to do any harm . . . all you wanted was to kiss my hands; isn't that so?"

• "That was all, my beauty!"

"Then I take great pleasure in having you kiss them, Ricardo . . . Take them! . . ."

The young girl lifted up her gentle hands, and waved them in the air, fair and white as two doves just flying from the nest. Ricardo kissed them gallantly.

"That doesn't suit me," continued the girl, laughing; "you always used to kiss my face whenever you met me or said good by . . . Why have you ceased to do so? . . . Are you afraid of me? . . . I am not a woman . . . I am still only a child . . . Until I grow up you have the right

¹ tonta.

to kiss me . . . then it will be another thing . . . Come, give me a kiss on the forehead . . .”

The young man bent over and gave her a kiss on the forehead.

“If you would not be angry, I would ask for another here;” and she touched her moist, rosy lips.

The young marquis grew red in the face; he remained an instant motionless; then bending down his head, he gave the girl a prolonged kiss on her lips.

A strong gust of wind waked the ocean just as he was getting ready to sleep; he stirred an instant in his immense bed of sand, as though he were going to change his position, and uttered a low murmur of discontent. The waves in the distance began to roll in, big and blue; on the beach they clamored with strong voices. The lights which had shone on their crests were gone, and the magnificent ebullition of the submarine treasure had ceased. The silver spot was fast taking on the melancholy reflections of burnished steel.

When Ricardo raised his head, the first thing he did was to cast an anxious glance along the line of the point. The water already surrounded them. He sprang up hastily, and, without saying a word, seized Marta in his arms as easily as though she had been a fawn, and making a tremendous leap, he fell headlong on the nearest point, slightly cutting his hand. Marta was entirely unharmed, and she looked at the young man's wound; then taking out her delicate linen handkerchief she silently bound it around it, and started off with rapid steps. Ricardo followed her. They both walked in perfect silence. The distance between them grew greater and greater; for Marta no longer walked; she ran. The young marquis felt a vague discomfort, and a strange

uneasiness which caused him to deliberate as he walked ; he was angry with himself. When they entered the mouth of the tunnel leading to the pine grove, he entirely lost sight of his friend, and could not even hear the noise of her boots on the ground. When he reached the middle of the cave where it was perfectly dark, he thought he heard, very confusedly, the echo of a sob, and his heart was still more oppressed. After he got out into the light he felt better.

When they got to the house they found that a number of servants had been sent out in search of them, as everything had been long ready for the return. The afternoon was wearing on, and the ladies would not find it much to their liking should night catch them on the sea. They were welcomed back therefore with signs of satisfaction, and all hands hastened to settle themselves again in the *falúas*, which, on account of the swell, were as restless as horses harnessed and waiting for their master at the stable door.

Their sails were raised, and making long tacks to get advantage of the wind, they bore away to El Moral. Marta, when she entered the yawl, had lost the bright color from her cheeks.

The sun constantly hastened toward the horizon. The ladies looked with foreboding as the shadows crept over the sky and the sea, and they cast anxious looks at the sailors. The frequent tacks made by the yawls delayed them extraordinarily, and at last they had to furl the sails and follow the direct course by oars. There is nothing strange in this, and it is the most usual way when the wind is not astern ; but it happened that Rosarito, the *Señorita de Morí's* friend, took it into her head that the change from sails to oars signified imminent danger of

shipwreck, and this she represented in her imagination with all the horrors by which it is surrounded in magazine stories, — the pitchy darkness of the night, the waves rising like mountains to the sky, the cries of the sailors mingling with the roaring of the sea, etc., etc. And being unable to control herself, she began to clutch her friend with nervous hands and to utter exclamations of anguish and fear.

“Alas! O God!¹ we are going to perish, we are going to perish!”

“There is nothing wrong; calm yourself, Rosario.”

“Yes, yes! we are going to perish . . . we are going to be drowned . . . O God, what a terrible death! . . . Why should I have gone to the island? . . . What will my papa say when he learns that his daughter is dead? . . . Papa! my heart’s papa!”

“But, child alive, there’s absolutely nothing to be afraid of!”

“Don’t tell me so, for God’s sake; because can’t I see that they have lowered the sails. Alas! what a death! what a frightful death! . . . To die without confession! . . . To die away from my papa! . . . And to be buried right here in these awful black depths! . . . And be eaten by the fishes! and by crabs . . . It’s horrible! . . .”

The Señorita de Mori’s efforts to calm her friend were useless. It added no little to her fright to hear the shouts of the sailors, who in order to encourage each other and overcome the resistance of the waves, at each stroke of the oars shouted in chorus, yo-heave-oh!² — yo-heave-oh! Every time that this exclamation rang

¹ *Ay, Dios mio.*

² *aaaguanta.*

through the air with its brutal rhythm, Rosario breathed a shriek of anguish ; till the vivacious Señorita de Morí, fearing that she was getting ill, said to the sailors, —

“Gentlemen, will you have the goodness not to say yo-heave-oh ! for it greatly frightens this young lady.”

But Rosario, quite irritated and shedding a sea of tears, instantly exclaimed, —

“No, no ; let them say yo-heave-oh ! but let us perish quickly if we are going to ! . . .”

Little by little, however, and seeing that the tremendous catastrophe did not take place, her nerves grew calmer, and before long she was laughing, giddy girl that she was, at her ridiculous fears.

In the Elorza *falúa* there was little talking. Don Mariano and Don Maximo were too full of medoc to feel like indulging in an animated conversation. The Señorita de Delgado, seconded by her sisters, admired the sunset with lively transports of enthusiasm, and with much opening and shutting of eyes. The Marquis of Peñalta had closed his, and seemed to be dozing with his cheek in his hand. One or two couples were whispering together.

What was Marta thinking about at that moment, her gaze fastened on the sea, serious, motionless, and pale as a statue ? What black phantasms rose before her from the depths of the waters to trace in her fair brow the deep furrows with which it was corrugated ? What deathly secrets whispered the breeze in her ear ?

Ah ! easier were it to unriddle the mystery in the murmurs of the ocean and the secrets of the breeze than the vague thoughts hidden behind a maiden's brow !

The sea once more tried to dispose itself for slumber ; the crests of its waves no longer gleamed white from

afar with their crown of foam; the horizon withdrew its indefinite line, which faded away in the twilight shadow. The smooth, swelling billows rose and fell like the indolent, tranquil breathing of a gigantic bosom. One by one, with lovely ease and confidence, the *falúas*, leaving them behind, swept onward to the port. The coast with its dark, undulating line girdled the luminous plain. Far in the distance inland, the peaks of the mountains could be seen bathed in a transparent violet haze.

Marta's thought broke through the glutted cloud which girt it in with a sea of confusions and vaguenesses, and in her soul arose all at once a host of sweet and ineffable recollections like so many luminous points with which the serene sky of her life was sown. She amused herself a long time in recounting them, taking new delight in each. How bright and beautiful they burned in her memory! What a gentle light they cast over the monotonous, laborious days of her existence! They were surrounded by silence and mystery; no one had enjoyed them, no one had known them except herself; the very hand which had dropped into her heart the balm of joy was absolutely ignorant of its beneficent influence. This thought filled her with a secret delight which brought a smile to her pale lips. One by one, however, and without her knowing why, those luminous points vanished away, were blotted out and lost in the deep, black abyss of an idea. Her imagination began to fly about like a bewildered bird within this sad and desperate idea where not the slightest ray of light could penetrate. Why was she in the world? The happiness which she had discovered was another's, and there was nothing else left to do but to look upon it without grief and without envy, for envy in this case would be a terrible sin. And was she sure of not falling into it

at any moment, or what was worse, was she sure of not raising her hand against that happiness? The hidden beach on the island came instantly into her memory, with its golden sands and its foaming waves flinging their foam flakes upon her. A great remorse, a keen, cruel remorse, began to make its way into her innocent heart like the sharp point of a dagger, causing her such anguish that she uttered a muffled groan heard only by herself. Confusion and dizziness tormented her brain; her head burned like a volcano. She raised her hand to her brow, and it was as cold as though made of marble. This gave her an extraordinary shock of surprise. So much heat within and so cold without!

The ocean at that moment seemed full of peace and gentleness. The sun was just about submerging his heated face in the crystal of the waters, but still lighted up a few places in the vast plain with a fantastic, gilded light, leaving others in the shade. The murmurs were heavier and deeper, of an infinite melancholy; that measureless mass of water was slowly losing its azure hue and changing to another, of very opaque green, sown here and there with fleeting reflections. The melancholy ease with which the sea took leave of the light made a deep impression upon Marta. With her head leaned over the water, and with dreamy eyes, she watched the most delicate tints which the light was awakening in it, and listened to the murmurs which resounded in the depths.

The sun was entirely sunken. The ocean gave one immense, colossal sob. In this sob was so much compassion that Marta thought she felt the ambient air vibrate with a movement of sympathy and wonder. Never had she seen the sea so grand and so sublime, so strong and so generous at once. That august silence,

that momentary repose of the great athlete, moved her to the depths of her soul, filled her turbulent spirit with an ardent desire for peace. Who had told her that the sea was terrible? What small heart had spoken to her of his cruel treacheries? Ah, no! The sea was noble and generous, as the strong always are, and his wrath, though fearful, was quickly over: in his tranquil depths live happily pearls and corals, the white sea-nymphs, the purple fishes.

The *falúa*, when it pressed up against his humid shoulder, made between bow and stern a broad, comfortable couch, with foamy edges, a couch where one might sleep eternally with face turned toward the sky, watching through the transparent bosom of the water the flashing of the stars.

"Heavens! . . . What was that?"

"Who has fallen overboard?"

"Daughter of my heart! . . . Marta! . . . Marta! Let go of me! . . . Let me save my daughter!"

"She is already safe, Don Mariano; there is no need of you wetting yourself."

"Back water! Back water! Steady! . . ." said the captain's rough voice. "Fling that line, Manuel . . . Don't be alarmed, ladies; it is nothing at all . . . Back water! Weigh all . . . Lay hold, all of you, on that line. There is nothing to worry about."

At first the confusion was great. Ricardo and one of the sailors had leaped into the water and were swimming powerfully to make up the short distance which the *falúa* had gone before the alarm was given. Ricardo, who was ahead, dived, and in a few seconds reappeared with the girl on his arm. The *falúa* was near them, and he could

clutch the rope which they had flung him, and then the gunwale of the yawl, finding himself suspended by a number of arms which lifted them on deck. Don Mariano, in the short moments that this lasted, struggled with Don Maximo and others, trying to leap into the water. When he saw his daughter on board, it took him but a moment to press her to his heart.

Martita had fainted away. Various ladies hastened to loosen her clothing and shake her violently to rid her of the water which she had swallowed. Then they laid her down on one of the seats on the deck, and Ricardo, taking a bottle of salts which Don Maximo had brought with him, applied it to her nostrils. She soon opened her eyes and, on seeing the young man's solicitous face leaning over her, she smiled sweetly, and said to him, so that no one else could hear:—

“Thanks, señor marqués! . . . It is not so bad down below there.”

When they reached El Moral, they dried themselves at the house of some friends who were taking baths there, and they donned the first clothes that came to hand. Then they once more took up their homeward way, and reached the quay at one o'clock, finding each of their respective families were beginning to feel anxious over their late arrival.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCE.

DON MARIANO's guests were amusing themselves with the game of forfeits. The evening was thoroughly disagreeable, and only the most courageous had ventured out. When this happened (and it was not very infrequent) music and dancing were forbidden and games of cards, of commerce¹, or of forfeits were substituted, or at times merely a pleasant, bright conversation. On the evening of which we are speaking, the feminine sex was represented by three Misses de Ciudad, two Delgados, the Señorita de Morí, and one more who, together with those of the family made a sufficiently respectable nucleus; in the masculine part figured the family physician, Señor de Ciudad, Don Serapio; the engineer Suárez, and four or five other young fellows who, being simple and insignificant, deserve no special mention. The tertulia occupied only one corner of the parlor, although on occasions when the game required, it was scattered about over the whole of it. Don Mariano, surrounded by the *solemn fathers*, walked up and down, and enjoyed his discussions, frequently stopping to lay down some intricate logic, and then continuing his walk with hands behind his back.

It fell to Don Serapio's lot to say *yes* and *no* three times each, and consequently he retired to one of the corners, gazing at the wall. The ladies and gentlemen *once*

¹ *aduana*.

more gathered together in one group, and began to whisper with the greatest animation, each one proposing some question. At last they agreed to ask him if he enjoyed *bisogné*.

"Eeeeh?" shouted the chorus, dwelling on the vowel.

"Yes," replied the unhappy Don Serapio.

The reply was received with tumult and delight, making the proprietor of the canning factory tremble in his shoes. Next they agreed upon asking him if he had any intention of getting married. "No" was his unhesitating reply. "Bravo, bravo!" shouted the men.

"What a stony-hearted man!" cried the women.

One of the young fellows proposed that they should ask him if he still had a fondness for chamber-maids. The ladies wanted to oppose this, but there was no remedy.

"Eeeeh?"

"Yes."

Great laughter and applause in the group. The same malevolent young fellow proposed something even worse; "to ask him if he intended to give any of his children a profession." The ladies seriously objected to this question, and another was given in its place. And thus they continued until he had said the three *yeses* and the three *noes* required by the game, and then, greatly despondent, he came to find out what the questions had been.

It came next to Amparito Ciudad to give a favor to each of the gentlemen of the party, and she began to perform the duty with the greatest discretion and grace, beginning with the young fellows, except the engineer Suárez, who roundly declared that he was not satisfied with any of her propositions, and whispered to her very softly what the only thing was that would satisfy him. Amparito blushed a little, and replied with a gentle look of re-

proach, at the same time casting a glance at her father, who fortunately had his back turned while promenading with Don Mariano.

Isidorito's turn came next, and it unfortunately fell to him to be put "in Berlina"; and what a chance this was for the Señorita de Morí! Isidorito, though not attractive at all, inspired general respect on account of his reputation as a studious, sensible young man: thus the majority of the girls and boys contented themselves with criticising him¹ as "too serious," as "having too little hair," as "dancing very badly," as "studying to excess," as "wearing too long coat tails," etc., etc; but when it came to the Señorita de Morí, who was impatiently waiting her turn, she put him *in Berlin* with unconcealed satisfaction as "very heavy in brain and light in stomach." Isidorito, noticing the reasons for their criticisms, recognized with grief the source of that envenomed dart; but he did not care to show that he did, and preferred to preserve in this respect a noble, and at the same time, a prudent silence.

The eldest daughter of the family, as usual, took no share in the game. She was sitting by her mother's side, totally oblivious of all that was going on around her, with her eyes fixed on vacancy. A strange, intense pallor covered her somewhat emaciated but always lovely face, and her whole body showed signs of uneasiness and anxiety. She scarcely answered the questions which Doña Gertrudis asked her from time to time, and if she did, it was with such curtness that it took away all the worthy lady's desire to repeat them. Four or five times already she had got up from her chair and gone to the balcony, remaining a long time in it with her forehead

¹ ponerle en Berlina.

leaning on the glass, without any one knowing what she was looking at. The plaza of Nieva, just as on the first night when we saw it, was dark and filled with pools of water, wherein were reflected the melancholy beams from the kerosene lamps burning in the corners. Not a soul was crossing it that night. She turned her eyes in vain to penetrate the darkness under the eaves: the neighbors had all withdrawn into their houses, perfectly convinced that dampness is the cause of many infirmities. The windows of the Café de la Beneficencia were the only ones that were lighted. The air was filled with a gentle murmur of rain which barely made itself audible through the panes to the young girl's ears.

It came Rosarito's turn to act the sultana. The dandified young fellow with the hair over his forehead, placed a chair in the middle of the room and seated her in it: then he spread before her a velvet cushion. The young men of the tertulia, like genuine Moors, began to march before her, bending their knees in her presence and waiting humbly for her choice. Rosarito, with the notable ability which all women have for playing queen, rejected them one after the other with a gesture of sovereign disdain. Only when the young fellow of the mazurkas came by, and tremblingly bent low at her feet, the beautiful but ferocious sultana deigned to hand him the handkerchief which she held in her hand and to select him as her lover, as a just reward for his most distinguished neckties and his no less exceptional *chaquets*! Then the two marched in a triumphal procession to the harem; what amounts to the same thing, they walked two around the parlor, and sat down on the sofa where they had been before.

The little tertulia, after exhausting the not very varied

resources of the game of forfeits, remained inactive and comfortable in the corner of the parlor, engaging in a low but very lively conversation, broken by bursts of laughter and exclamations, as the brilliant young men of the party found occasion to amuse them at the expense of some unfortunate, whom they flayed pitilessly. Those who had not this talent contented themselves with smiling and stupidly applauding the others' repartees, and occasionally trying to put their fingers in the pie with little success. They made interminable jokes on the girls about their suitors, and the girls defended themselves as usual with the classic replies: "I don't know why you should say so." "You have been very ill-informed." "He comes to see me as a friend and nothing more," etc., etc. The mischievous smiles and the expression of something hidden accompanying these replies, told very clearly that the girls did not object to be chaffed in that way.

Doña Gertrudis had gone to sleep. Don Mariano and his proselytes were still promenading from one end of the parlor to the other, involved in deep disquisitions on the probable fall of real estate. Maria was again standing with her forehead leaning against the panes, apparently absorbed in one of her long and frequent meditations to which her household were accustomed, but in reality exploring with anxious eyes the shadows which enwrapped the plaza of Nieva. She paid little heed to the frivolous conversation kept up by the guests. She soon heard a strange noise in the distance and trembled. She abstracted herself as much as possible from the confusion in the room, and lent a deep and uneasy attention to that distant rumble which gradually grew louder and louder in the silence of the night, each moment becoming clearer and more definite. It was not a confused, fantastic noise,

like those caused by the wind or the sea, but solid and well-defined, perfectly clear in Maria's ears. Soon it grew into the measured and characteristic sound of a multitude marching in step. The young woman's astonished eyes could distinguish by the street lamps the points of bayonets and the varnished caps of the soldiery. All the guests on hearing the noise, hurried to the balconies, and saw with surprise two companies marching by the house, crossing the plaza, and disappearing from sight in the cross-streets of the town.

Don Mariano's friends looked at each other in amazement.

"What are those soldiers going to do at this time o' day?" asked one lady.

"I don't understand where they are going," replied Don Mariano. "To get to the interior of the province, even though they came from the West, there is no need of their going through here; they have the valley of Cañedo, and that is a much shorter road."

"This very day I was calling on the captain," said Don Maximo, "and he did not say a single word to me of the coming of these companies."

"I didn't know it, either," said the Señor de Ciudad. "The most likely thing is that they are on the march, and are only going to spend the night here, and start off again in the morning."

"It's a strange thing," added Don Mariano, "but of course it may be — it may be."

The young people returned to their places, and quick forgot the incident, as they gayly took up the broken thread of conversation. Their elders continued the promenade, making interminable comments and endless hypotheses about the unexpected visitation. Maria s

stayed obstinately at the window, shielded from the eyes of her friends by the great damask curtains.

A very heated discussion about music had been set on foot in the group of *young* people, among whom figured the sensitive *Señorita de Delgado*, in spite of the vehemently expressed protests of *Rosarito*, who declared on her word that the said *señorita* had often held her in her arms, and that, when she as a child was going to confession, and the *Señorita de Delgado* was at her house, she had kissed her hand, as an *elderly person*.¹ One of the most elegant of young men, who had been educated in Madrid for five different professions in succession, upheld the superiority of the German composers, declaring that there were no operas like *Roberto*, *Les Huguenots*, and *Le Prophète*, and that no symphonies could be compared with those of Beethoven and Mozart. The ladies, powerfully supported by the rest of the men, stood up for the advantages of Italian music.

"Don't nauseate us with your Germans, Severino! What kind of music do they make! It sounds to me like a pack of dogs barking."

"That is only at first; if you should continue to hear it, you would acquire the taste for it; the same thing happens with olives and ale."

"Then if one has to go through such wretched moments to get used to it, surely the thing isn't worth the trouble, you see! This does not happen with Italian music; you enjoy it from the very first."

"Of course, for the most part of Italian music is only a melody accompanied by four guitars."

"Silence, man, silence! Don't speak blasphemies. Would you think of comparing rubbish, which they them-

¹ *persona mayor*.

selves don't understand. with the sublime finale of *Lucia*, or with the soprano aria of *La Favorita* which begins, *Oh mioooo — Ferua — a — a — an — do — riii — raaa — ri — ro — ra — riii — ira —* ”

“ Ah, if you had heard the fourth act of *Les Huguenots*! What dramatic music! How expressive! It makes the hair stand on end! How magnificent this duet is: *La — sciami — paar — tiir — la — sciami — paar — tiir — riiira — riri — riri — ra — rōō — riri — ra — rōō — laaa — tō — rii — ro — ra —* ”

“ But could you ever hear anything sweeter than the concerted piece in *Somnambula* beginning, *Tōō — ra — ri — rō — ra — rōōō — laa — riii — rō — raa — rōra — rōō. — rii — ra — ri — rōō?* ”

“ Impossible! impossible! ” said several at once.

“ Above all, Italian music stirs the heart, while German music only deafens you,” added the Señorita de Delgado.

“ That's true,” affirmed her sister, the widow.

“ I believe,” continued the señorita, “ that the object of music is to move . . . to elevate the soul . . . to cause us to shed tears . . . to transport us to ideal regions far away from the prosaic world in which we live . . . For the truth is that prose is getting such control over society that soon it will seem ridiculous to speak of things which are not material and sordid.”

“ Certainly,” affirmed the widow again.

“ Music follows the road of prose like everything else . . . Don't you hear what silly things they sing nowadays what insipid, popular airs? And you are lucky if it isn't some indecent piece from some opera bouffe! In song love is not mentioned; there are only phrases with doubtful meanings hiding some nastiness.”

“ I believe that you know some very pretty romantic

ballads, and sing them admirably," said the youth with the banged hair, ready, as always, to provide the tertulia with a new enjoyment.

"No, señor . . . don't you believe it . . . In days gone by I used to sing some . . . but I have forgotten them . . ."

"For my part," persisted the youth, with a deeply diplomatic smile, — "and I think the same may be said of all these people — it would give the greatest pleasure if you would search into your memory and let us listen to some . . . Isn't it so, friends?"

"Yes, yes, Margarita, sing something, for Heaven's sake!"

"But supposing I don't remember anything!"

"Nonsense! it will come back to you . . . If you once begin, you will find yourself gradually remembering it."

"It seems to me impossible . . . Besides I always accompanied myself with the guitar."

"Isn't there a guitar in the house?" quickly asked the youth, jumping up from his chair.

The guitar which Marta brought lacked two or three strings, and they had to be put on, in which operation some time was lost. Then there was delay in getting them in tune. When it was once tuned the Señorita de Delgado declared up and down that she would not sing, for she did not remember anything. The tertulia was deeply grieved, and with reiterated entreaties endeavored to inspire her to recollect some delicious melody. But as the singer did not put up the instrument, and continued to thumb the strings softly, all became silent and waited eagerly for the song. However, just as the sensitive señorita was about to utter the first note, she made a fresh and categorical protestation to the same effect as before, and this so grieved the tertulia and particularly the

youth with the braided hair, that they would gladly have granted the singer all the memory at their disposal, on condition that she would not leave it in any bad place. At last the señorita fixed her eyes on the ceiling, and in a quite dulcet though quavering voice, she struck up the following song, the music of which I would transfer to paper with great pleasure, if I knew how to write the score. Unfortunately, in my philharmonic studies I never went beyond the key of G with even moderate success : —

*“Hope that art so flattering to my inmost feeling,
Thou dost all my bitter sorrow calm.
Ay! thou art no creature of imagination.
To the heart thou bringest welcome balm.
If a cruel fate remove me from the presence
Of my loved one many leagues away,
Then 'tis Hope alone that soothes my deep affliction,
Promising a brighter, happier day.”*

“Bravo, bravo!” — “How pretty!” — “How sweet!”
— “How melancholy!” — “Go on, Margarita, do go on!”
The Señorita de Delgado continued in this way : —

*“If at solitary midnight I am thinking
Of my sweetheart's ever blessed name,
And before my spellbound memory slowly rises
Her enchanting features lined in flame, —
Then 'tis thou, O Hope, that softly prophesiest
That my loved one will return some day;
Then 'tis Hope alone that soothes my deep affliction,
Promising a brighter, happier day.”*

Just as this point was reached, and when the audience was getting ready to enjoy the most remarkable sweetness of a new strophe, even more passionate and more pathetic.

than the last, when the *Señorita de Delgado* was languorously laying her pudgy fingers on the strings of the instrument, and drooping her head still more languorously on her bosom in testimony of her bitter grief, there occurred one of those strange and terrible events, more terrible still from being unexpected, and therefore overwhelming, that suspend and for the time being cut short the use of speech : an extraordinary scene, occurring with such rapidity that it allowed no time for reflection, and left the spectators in the deepest consternation without power of interference.

The parlor door was thrown violently open, and the eyes of the bystanders turned toward it, saw with surprise the pale face of a servant, who addressed his master, saying, —

“ *Señor ! Señor !* ”

“ What is the trouble ? ” asked Don Mariano, in the energetic tone customary to high-strung natures, when they suspect danger.

“ The soldiers are here ! ”

“ And what have I to do with soldiers, you dolt ! ” replied the master in an angry voice.

“ Th-they’re c-come to arrest you ! ”

“ It isn’t true ! ” cried a voice from the hall.

And at the same time six or eight figures filled the doorway behind the servant. The first to be seen were a very young officer in undress uniform, and a caballero, not very well favored, in a tight-buttoned great-coat, and holding in his hand a staff with tassels. Behind them were seen the caps and the muskets of several soldiers. The man with the staff, who was apparently the one who had spoken, advanced two steps into the parlor, and without removing his hat asked Don Mariano sharply, —

“ Are you Don Mariano Elorza ? ”

The old gentleman’s eyes sparkled with indignation.

"First of all, take off your hat!"

The man with the staff, somewhat bluffed by Don Mariano's attitude and the looks of the company, took off his sombrero.

"Now, what is your business?"

"Are you Don Mariano Elorza?"

"No! I am the *excelentísimo señor* Don Mariano Elorza!"

"It's the same thing."

"It is not the same thing!"

"Well, let us drop discussions; I have orders to arrest your daughter, Doña Maria."

All the Señor de Elorza's energy suddenly vanished like a shadow, at hearing those portentous words. He stood a few moments bewildered and petrified, with his face crestfallen, like one who has just beheld a miracle and has no faith in his own eyes. Then suddenly recovering himself, he sprang at the man with the staff, and shaking him violently by the lapel of his coat, he said to him in a voice of thunder, —

"And who are you, insolent man, to dare think of such a thing?"

"I am the chief of police¹ for this province, and I warn you that if you offer the least resistance I shall make use of the force which I have with me."

"Are you perfectly sure that it is my daughter who you come to arrest?"

"Yes Sir; I have orders to arrest the Señorita Doña Maria Elorza. I request you to hand her over to me without delay."

"Here I am," said Maria, issuing from the hollow of the balconied window, and advancing toward the chief of police.

¹ *Jefe de orden publico*

"But it cannot be," thundered Don Mariano again, holding his daughter back. "This man is crazy or has come to the wrong place."

"Are you ready to go with me?" asked the *comisario* of the young woman.

"Yes, señor," was her firm reply.

"Then come along."

"Don Mariano hid his face in his hands, and exclaimed with a cry of agony, —

"Daughter of my heart, what have you been doing?"

"Nothing that dishonors me or dishonors you," replied the girl proudly, lifting her lovely face and hastening from the room. Don Mariano was held back by all his friends who clustered around him, but quickly finding himself alone, as all, warned by a cry from Marta, hastened to the assistance of Doña Gertrudis who had fainted, he darted like a flash from the room.

CHAPTER XII.

GATHERED THREADS.

SOME time before the events which we have just related, the loves of Ricardo and Maria, which had been going on in a gradual diminuendo like the notes of a beautiful melody, until Ricardo himself knew not whether they really existed or had completely died away; whether he was the lover of the first-born daughter of the Elorzas, or whether he had other rights over her heart than those granted to an old valued friend — these loves, I say, had suddenly and unexpectedly gained, without any one knowing a reason for it, a new lease of life, just as a light about to die from lack of oil is renewed by being given a good quantity of this combustible. Every one was surprised to see them together, talking as before in one corner of the parlor, during long interviews, oblivious of everything around them, dwelling in that nook of heaven which lovers find as easily in crowds as in solitude. Satisfaction followed surprise in their friends, and this in turn was followed by hypotheses as to the approach of the wedding-day, and conjectures about the means of serving to make such a change in the conduct of the lovers. The mischievous ones, winking as they said it, declared that of the three enemies of the soul, the first was the most to be feared, and that therefore *Crescite et multiplicamini*, and that it was only a fight against the laws of nature. The ladies, casting down their eyes, declared that in all states one could well

serve God, and that not the easiest of penances were imposed by the care and education of children and the rule of the house. But at all events, the fact was that things had changed without any one knowing why, and that ladies and gentlemen were delighted, hoping that the illustrious partners would soon vouchsafe them a happy day. Don Mariano's delight was so great that it shone through his eyes every time that he turned them toward the handsome couple, and a thousand lovely dreams in which figured a swarm of rosy, frolicsome grandchildren, just as his daughter had been, came at night to caress him in the solitudes of his feudal couch. Doña Gertrudis, as usual, thoroughly approved of Maria's conduct. Learn now how this state of things came about.

One morning when the young Marqués de Peñalta awoke earlier than usual, noticing from the window of his room that the sky was clear (contrary to its time-honored custom), he felt an inclination to take a walk in the environs of the town, and making the thought father to the act, he hastily dressed and went down into the street in search of pure air; but before he left the inner town, as he was passing the Elorza mansion, he accidentally met Maria going to church with her maid. His heart gave a leap, and, somewhat agitated, he stopped to salute her. The girl met him with that gay, blithesome gesture, full at once of mischievousness and candor which was peculiar to her nature, and therefore impossible to overcome by any force.

"You have got up early — to hear mass, I suppose?"

"Oh no," replied Ricardo with a smile; "I was going to take a walk in the country, as it must be very lovely now."

"Very well; but to-day you must not go to walk: I

claim you. and am going to take you to mass." said the girl in a tone of resolution. and with a decidedly adorable inflection of voice: and suiting the action to the word. she took him by the hand and led him captive this way for a number of feet.

Lucky Ricardo! what better could he desire at that moment than to see himself captured in such a lovely way? He could not say a word during the first few moments. Emotion overmastered him. and a tear slid down his honest. manly face.

"Oh, Maria, if you knew how happy you make me!" he said to her in a low, trembling voice. "If you wanted to take me with you, where would I not go? You cannot comprehend how I long for you to speak with me, to smile on me, to lead me. I try eagerly to find ways to please you, and I don't find them. Tell me how I can cause you any pleasure, how I can melt the ice which is destroying our love, and I will try to do it, even if it should cost me my life. If I did not love you more than any other being in this world, and also as the blessed remembrance of my mother, how long ago I should have left you forever! . . . But my love is of such a nature, it is so strong, so eager, so absorbing, that it has succeeded in disarming all my pride . . . and I fear that it has got the better of my dignity," he added in a low tone.

The young woman looked at him steadily, full of delight and admiration of such sincere affection, and she replied gayly, —

"At present you can please me by going to mass with me; will you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Will you come to-morrow also, and every other day?"

"Yes, loveliest, I ask nothing better."

"You don't know how you rejoice me, Ricardo!"

"Truly?"

"Yes, I love you dearly, but I want you to be good and religious, because, before everything else we ought to think of our salvation, and make it our richest possession in this world."

The young man at that moment felt his heart melt within him, as he drank in the drops of affection which his sweetheart let fall upon his lips. There is nothing that can so quickly change our most deeply rooted ideas and our firmest judgments as the voice of the woman whom we love. Ricardo was a lukewarm believer, like most men of our day, and he detested exaggerations, and looked with decided repugnance upon religious practices. Accordingly then, by the work of enchantment, that is, by the work of that sweet voice and those still sweeter eyes, which gazed upon him with eloquent expression, he was stripped of his anti-clerical opinions, and was transformed into a decided champion of the altar and a fervid devotee of the saints, male and female, of the celestial court. He took delight in thinking that what his betrothed was doing was, after all, not blameworthy; that her piety and mysticism were the reflection of a noble and lofty spirit; that this same piety was the sweet pledge of her conjugal happiness, since it would cause her to refrain from the vanities to which other women after marriage devote themselves; that there was nothing strange in the poor girl desiring her betrothed to be a believer and devout, when her ideas about eternal salvation were taken into consideration, and that in this regard he had done very wrong to oppose her so obstinately, striking her in the very heart of her sensitive and admirable faith;

finally he came to the conclusion that he was a barbarian, incapable of enjoying the sacraments or of understanding the adorable mysteries which a heart consecrated to God might take in, and that Maria was a saint who had borne with him with too much patience. Moved, partly by this thought, and infinitely more by the emotion caused by his sweetheart's unexpected favor, he replied with accents of tenderness : —

“ Listen Maria . . . You know well that I am not, and have never been an unbeliever . . . It is true I have looked with a certain coolness on religious practices, but you ought to know just as well that this is a common fault among young men, and particularly among the military. . . . As for the rest, I tell you with all the sincerity of my soul, I have never abandoned the faith which my sainted mother taught me in childhood . . . Even now ring in my ears her counsels, and still I can repeat without mistake, the multitude of prayers which she made me say on my knees on the bed, when I retired . . . That cannot be forgotten, Maria . . . It would be infamous if one forgot it ! To-day the same counsels are repeated by lips that I worship . . . How could you think that a religion always inculcated by the beings whom I have most loved and respected in my life, should not be sweet ! . . . Yes, my loveliest, I am religious by birth and by conviction, and I hope to be still more fervently so by your aid . . . Tell me what you desire me to do in this regard, and I will do it . . . Tell me what thoughts you wish me to think, and I will think them ! . . . I am all yours, body and soul . . . ”

“ Thus, thus I love you . . . But you must not be religious for the sake of my love, for then it has no merit in it, but for the sake of God. The ties which are made in this world, — what are they worth in comparison with that exist-

ing eternally between the Creator and his creatures? If you love me much, love me in God and for God, as I love you. In any other way it is a sin to fix our attention and our love on any creature."

Ricardo's emotion and ardor received from these words a dash of cold water, but they were strong enough to persist without diminution, and they still kept control of his heart until they reached the portico of the church. Then Maria, taking the holy water, and offering it to him with the tips of her fingers, said:—

"Now you must stay under the choir to hear the mass; I am going up to the altar. Be careful not to look for me a single time! You must understand that this would be to profane the sanctuary, and in such a case it would be better for you not to come in."

"No, I will not look at you, though it will be very hard work."

"Give me your word that you won't."

"I give it."

"Well, then, adios, . . . it won't be long¹ . . . wait for me at the entrance . . ."

After she had gone several steps away, she turned around to say in a very subdued tone,—

"Be sure to do as I said, . . . and be reverent, will you?"

Ricardo gave a sign of assent, while a happy smile brightened his face.

From that time forth the Marqués de Peñalta every morning escorted the eldest daughter of the Elorzas to mass, leaving her at the church door and joining her again when service was over. Maria evidently felt great pleasure in having his company, and as for Ricardo, it is not easy to exaggerate the joy which suddenly fell upon

¹ *hasta luego*.

him through the change brought about in the behavior of his betrothed. Gradually her influence began to have such weight upon his spirit, that before long, as he himself had already suspected would be the case, his ideas began notably to modify, and not only his ideas but likewise his habits and manner of life, causing him to be more circumspect in nature, more careful in his speech, more gentle and more religious. Anxious to please his betrothed, who did not cease to urge him with entreaties and advice, he began to give up the noisy amusements and even the company of the other officers of the gun factory, going home early, frequenting churches, and spending many afternoons with some of the clergymen; he became a member of several pious confraternities, among them that of Saint Vincent de Paul, visiting the poor in company with the *beatos* of the town, and spending no little money in contributions for worship; finally, after many heartfelt prayers he made general confession to Fray Ignacio, Maria's confessor.

However strange it may seem, we must declare that Ricardo, far from feeling repugnance or discomfort in this new life, found deep, mysterious pleasures, which till then he had never enjoyed. The pomp and circumstance of the Catholic religion, to which he had hitherto paid little attention, began to fascinate him; the sweet seclusion of the church at eventide, when it is peopled with shadows and murmurs, filled him with a gentle perturbation, with a certain peculiar longing for a lofty secret something; the odors of the incense and wax were for him like a pleasant poison, which put him to sleep, carrying him away to glorious regions of immortal bliss; his frequent deeds of charity produced in him an agreeable aftertaste and a great sense of comfort, increasing his

faith; the humiliation of the sacrament of penance, which at first had been so distasteful to him, came to be a fountain of delights; he himself did not know whence they proceeded or how they took possession of his soul. Perhaps some of the psychological novelists who know so much and take such delight in investigating the deepest recesses of the consciousness of other people might discover the origin of those joys in the close union which our young friend created in the depths of his soul between religion and his love for Maria, and might see in the pleasure which Ricardo felt in running counter to his ideas, and mortifying his self-love, a certain analogy to what mystics and ascetics feel in the midst of their cruel torments, — the pleasure of sacrificing self for the beloved object. Perhaps they would set themselves minutely to investigate what part of that pleasure corresponded to pure devotion, and what part to the development of amorous sentiments and the movement of the feelings. Possibly, carried away by their love of analysis, and dragged from their moorings by the hurricane of impiety, which is nowadays apt to carry away with it this class of novelists, they might go so far as to declare that there exists at the bottom of religious practices and the ceremonial of the Church something which instead of calming the voice of the feelings adds to it, and that the inclination of the sexes, in the very heart of the religious life, within the temple itself, enjoying the soporific light reflected gently from the gilding of the altars, breathing the keen odors of the dust and the wax, and the narcotic perfume of the incense, listening to the moaning of the organ, and the vague murmur of the prayers of the faithful, acquires the flattering savor of forbidden fruit, and is more delicious and voluptuous than amid the splendor

and elegance of the ball-room. Possibly they would say this and add many other considerations to prove it, but I will not follow them on this path, which, without good reason, leads to the offending of timid consciences and the grievous confusing of the novelist with the philosopher. I limit myself gladly to setting forth facts without launching out into the philosophy of them, and I faithfully describe what I have seen and experienced, or have been told by trustworthy people.

One genuine fact, therefore, was that Ricardo enjoyed in his own way yielding to the counsels of his betrothed in reference to the practice of Christian virtue and pious deeds. The afternoon when he made general confession, he felt more deeply than ever the singular consolation and the lively delights to be enjoyed in the depths of humility. It was a clear, beautiful spring afternoon. Fray Ignacio, forewarned by Maria, was waiting for him in the sacristy of San Felipe, and received him with a certain familiar solemnity not free from condescension. He confessed in the sacristy itself, Fray Ignacio being seated in a wooden chair blackened and polished by use, while he knelt at his feet with the diffidence and emotion such as he used to feel as a boy when his mother led him by the hand to the same confessional. The shame of announcing his sins soon passed away, giving place to gentle tenderness full of unspeakable sweetness, which was so overpowering that he was constrained to turn his head. The spacious room in which he found himself, its lofty ceiling, its dusty walls set with black shelves and gloomy paintings, gave a melancholy echo to the murmured words of his confession; the sunlight made its way through the leaded panes of the two windows, making in the wide spaces lines of floating, luminous dust. The priest

threw one arm around his neck and brought his ear close to his lips, gradually probing with many leading questions the inmost nooks and corners of his conscience and the deepest secrets of his soul, sometimes severely chiding him, sometimes giving him sweet counsels, sometimes entertaining him with exemplary anecdotes which agreeably occupied for a few moments the intervals of the pious proceeding. He stopped to speak long of Ricardo's love and its advantages and of Maria's splendid character. Ricardo felt a lively pleasure in these words: he looked with admiration and reverence on that man who was the absolute master of his loved one's secrets, and he determined to put his soul into his hands, that he might guide it just as she had done. The priest continued with a final exhortation full of fire, wherein he eloquently united Maria's name with all the acts of virtue which he expected from him henceforth, so as to stir him to the highest pitch and kindle in his spirit sincere repentance and an irresistible desire to live piously and rejoice his betrothed. When they were done, and Fray Ignacio, assuming a certain solemnity, drew back a little and let fall upon him a full and generous absolution, the lines of the floating luminous lust had vanished and the sacristy was half enveloped in shadows. On the following day, when he went to mass with Maria, instead of waiting under the choir, he went with her to the great altar and received in her presence and to her great joy the holy wafer.

"You have given me the greatest pleasure of my life, Ricardo," she said as they went out of the church.

The young marquis smiled beatifically, and replied in a whisper, —

"Do you love me more now?"

"I don't care to answer you," replied the girl with a

sweet expression of face. "After communion one ought not to speak of such things . . . Let us wait till to-morrow."

They waited till the morrow, and then Maria told him without hesitation that his virtuous conduct inspired her with more and more love, and that he must not faint in the way if he desired to see himself always loved. Ricardo had no other thought than this, and he found so much to delight him in this new state of affairs that for no earthly advantage would he consent to change it. Thus, then, each day he kept on with greater resolution in the path which his betrothed laid out for him, and paid no heed to the chaffing of his companions of the factory, since it was difficult to catch sight of him anywhere else except at home, at Don Mariano's, or at church.

"You have converted me into a *beato*!" he said sometimes to Maria, as a sort of affectionate reproach.

"Why? are you getting tired of it, you rogue?"

"No, dear, no; I am happy enough because thus I have conquered your love . . ."

"Is that the only reason?"

" . . . And because I like to lead this better regulated and sober life."

"That is a different thing!"

Let us say here (though the reader will not have failed to perceive it) that in imagination, and even intelligence, Maria was the young Marqués de Peñalta's superior, and that in this regard, and taking into account the deep affection which he professed for her, it was nothing strange that he should yield to his mistress and her counsels in matters wherein men of greater learning and talent frequently give way to their mothers and wives. Maria, aside from her vivid imagination, stimulated . . .

kindled by continual reading, had a special gift for persuading. Her language was always easy and picturesque, and she took especial delight in moving her friends to compassion, when she wanted to entice from them money for the poor or for church services; the rare facility with which she passed from the serious and pathetic to the humorous, and mingled with an earnest entreaty the salt of a witty saying, made her irresistible. The religious confraternities and societies of Nieva had no more active and influential member, and they relied upon her in emergencies as upon a guardian angel who would be able to rescue them from their difficulties. As may be supposed, this lofty estimation was supported, not only by the young lady's splendid moral and physical qualities, but also in no small degree by the fact that she was the daughter of the richest and most respected gentleman in town.

Let us say also that at the period when these events occurred, the clergy and the religious tendencies of our people were suffering a mild sort of persecution on the part of the government, which was then under the control of liberals most extreme in their views and notorious for their heretical ideas, and this, as was to be expected, had greatly excited the consciences of the God-fearing, and had kindled in the Northern provinces, naturally more religious and more tenacious of tradition, an obstinate and bloody civil war which threatened to overthrow the body politic, and, at the same time, our wealth and prestige. All people of greater or less piety who loved our Catholic traditions, every one who detested the persecution suffered by the Church, and yearned for the kingdom of Jesus on earth under the mediation of his ministers, waited eagerly the result of this formidable war, in which were at stake not

only the more or less genuine rights of a claimant to the throne, but likewise the dearest and most august interests of religion. Those who frequented the churches and were on terms of intimacy with the clergy, took a tacit stand together against the heretics in power, receiving joyfully and quickly spreading all intelligence favorable to the royal-Catholic cause, and falling into anxiety and melancholy when bad news came. In the houses of the richest landed proprietors, in the sacristies, and in the back shops of many an absolutist merchant was read on the sly the *Cuartel Real*, the official journal of the Pretender, which came from time to time between pieces of *cretonne* or packages of macaroni. Festivals in honor of the Virgin were celebrated with great pomp as an atonement for the manifold impieties of the Congress of Deputies, and these festivals on more than one occasion ended violently by the interference of drunken Republicans. There was a great increase in attention to religious worship, especially to that of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and many pious people went on pilgrimages to the sanctuary of Lourdes, on their return telling their friends about the fine arrangement and the solid organization of the Catholic hosts in the Basque provinces. A number of young men of the best known families of Nieva had not been seen over night, concealing the real purpose of their absence. From this to open; resolute conspiracy is but a step, and in Nieva this preparatory step had already been taken. There was formed in the town a Carlist committee,¹ which held its meetings with a certain mystery and kept up close relations with the Central Committee, whose orders it obeyed, and a lively correspondence with the army of the Pretender. As in the country,

¹ *junta*.

though not to such a degree as in the Basque provinces, there existed sufficient elements for the service of the Catholic-monarchical cause, to bring about, provided they were well managed, if not a formal war, at least a serious agitation. The committee of Nieva, instigated by that of the capital, decided, after much vacillation and no few discussions, to raise a company within the territory. The preparations were very extensive; they began early in the winter, and did not terminate until the beginning of the spring. There were reports emanating from Bayonne, there came orders and plans of action, there were numberless secret meetings, a few women were enlisted, muskets were surreptitiously abstracted from the factory by a few Carlist workmen, a quantity of white caps and spatterdashes¹ were made; finally, one night there went out to camp some thirty young men, for the most part students and seminarists, at whose head marched the president of the committee, Don César Pardo, whom we had the honor of meeting at the end of the third chapter of this narration. Those who had sworn to go forth that night were more than three hundred, but only that handful of braves were on hand, and Don César, giving proofs of what he was, that is, a bold, heroic caballero, did not hesitate to take command of them, hoping by his example to carry along the timid. They made their way to the mountain by the valley of Cañedo; but on the next day a dozen policemen,² who immediately started in pursuit of them, took them by surprise just as they were dining in camp, and brought them back to the city, bound, without being able to make the least resistance. The people, hearing of the incident, hastened in great numbers

¹ *boinas blancas y polainas.*

² *guardias civiles.*

to await them on the highway, and saw them filing toward the jail, melancholy but dignified and stern, showing in their haughty eyes that if they had not been victims of a surprise, much blood would have been shed.

The eldest daughter of the house of Elorza, a most ardent devotee of religion, enlisted body and soul in the divine mission of sanctifying her spirit and saving it from the clutches of sin. An unwearied worker in the field of evangelical virtue, ever aspiring to greater perfection, and a zealous propagator of the faith, she could not fail to share in the indignation burning in the breast of the people with whom she had most to do. To her ears came, greatly exaggerated, the rumor of the revolutionary excesses, and the blasphemies daily uttered by the newspapers at the capital, though of course she never ventured to read them. Her confessors commanded her to implore God in her prayers, that the Church might triumph and its enemies be brought to confusion and repentance; her friends and companions in the confraternities asked her to join them in special novenas for the consolation of the Virgin; not a few times they asked alms of her for some priest who was lying in misery, and at other times for the unfortunate nuns of some convent, cruelly torn from that it might be turned into barracks. All these things along with a fervid affection for the holy institutions persecuted, continually fomented in her ardent, enthusiastic soul a deep aversion for the persecutors and the impious men who governed contrary to the law of God. Sometimes, carried away by her impressionable temperament, she felt powerful impulses to follow the example of Judith, making some villain expiate such horrible deeds of sacrilege. She would have liked to hold in her power the persecutors of Jesus, to destroy them and crush them

to powder. When these cruel impulses passed away, they left her always with a warm compassion for the innocent victims of the madness of impiety, and a vague desire to contribute with her blood to the reign of Jesus and Mary over all the powers of the earth. She felt that a something was born in her heart spurring her toward active life, persuading her to leave for a time the joys of contemplation for the pains of struggle, repose for labor, the enchantment of solitude for tumult; she heard, like the bride of the Sacred Song, a voice saying: "*Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled, for my head is filled with dew and my locks with the drops of the night.*" She saw clearly that her Jesus suffered for the injustices of men, and that he demanded her aid; that he asked a new proof of love by tearing her away from the comfort which she enjoyed and casting her amid the hurricanes of the world. But the beautiful young girl at the same time saw the enormous difficulties rising before her at the first step which she should make, the persecutions which would come upon her, and the certainty that those who loved her would regard her conduct as absurd. She understood her weakness, was afraid of the bitter griefs in store for her, and she replied, like the bride: "*I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?*" Long she struggled with herself to quench the voice calling her to active life, and convince herself that she could not do anything for the cause of the Lord; but it was in vain. All her specious arguments were answered victoriously by the voice, putting it before her that she ought not to question whether her aid would or would not be valuable, but simply to consider the will with which she offered it; that God was pleased oftentimes to show his power by entrusting the execution of great deeds

to humble and frail creatures, as was proved by the renowned Jean d'Arc, Saint Catalina of Sienna, Saint Teresa, and other excellent virgins who accomplished mighty works in spite of the high powers of the earth.

An insignificant incident brought Maria to a decision. Her uncle Rodrigo, Marqués de Revollar, who was one of the most important magnates of the court of the Pretender, learning of her enkindled faith and the relations which she maintained with the partisans of Catholic monarchy in Nieva, wrote her from Bayonne, asking her if she were ready to serve as intermediary for the correspondence between him and Don César Pardo, president of the Carlist committee. Maria hastened to reply that she should be delighted to do so, and from that time she began frequently to receive letters from her uncle, enclosed in which came others for Don César. These were doubtless the thread by which the Carlist conspiracy of Nieva was connected with the lofty spheres whence the orders emanated. And, without her knowing how, she found herself compromised — and she was not troubled by it — in the cause of the good Christians who, as she frequently heard from the lips of Don César and others, were endeavoring to restore Jesus to his sacred throne, and to rescue him from pride and heresy. Far, as I said, from feeling fear or trouble by it, her courage increased from the danger that she ran, and this was for her a manifest sign that the favor of heaven accompanied her, and she constantly entangled herself more and more in the designs of the conspirators, being present at their meetings and serving them with zeal and enthusiasm to the best of her ability. At the time of Don César's armed expedition she it was who embroidered the standard and the flannel hearts which the defenders of the faith wore,

sewed on their waistcoats. The conspirators felt toward her the greatest respect on account of her reputation for sanctity, and they professed for her deep affection for the enthusiasm with which she burned for the cause. In some of these meetings she was invited to give her opinion, and she did so with such talent and eloquence, she showed so much fire, and at the same time so much discretion in her language, that the conspirators saw in the beautiful young girl an angel sent from God to sustain their faith and cause them to hold firm in their mighty schemes.

After Don César's abortive attempt the Carlists of Nieva were quite cast down. Maria shed many tears, and besought God earnestly that He would not allow iniquity and falsehood to prevail against His holy law, and that He would have compassion on His good soldiers, now banished and persecuted. And, in fact, God had compassion, and allowed Don César and the larger part of the young men, who with him had been banished to the Canary Islands, to escape in a foreign steamship, and return *incognito* to their fatherland, where they hid in the houses of their faithful and valorous friends. Thereupon the partisans of tradition recovered their energy and began once more to plot, though it was vaguely and without definite object. The object did not appear for some time, until the heroic and determined Don César suggested the idea of striking an audacious blow which would suddenly give them the means of struggling advantageously with the few troops in the province. This stroke, proposed by the valiant ringleader, was nothing less than to seize the gun factory¹ of Nieva. At first all thought the project a crazy one, but gradually, by dint of

¹*fábrica de armas.*

thinking the idea over and over, they came to look upon it as less unreasonable, and even began quietly, and with great enthusiasm, to prepare the means for carrying it out. Such being the state of things, Maria, one afternoon, went to the house where Don César was concealed, and asked to speak with him in private. What the damsel said must have been exceedingly important and flattering, for the old ringleader, offering her his hand, and giving her a kiss upon the forehead, replied with trembling voice:—

“My daughter, you are going to be our salvation. God desires to submit the lot of many brave men to such dainty hands, and who knows if not also the triumph of His cause?”

The young woman retired to her room, where she engaged in prayer for a long time, and then she went down to her mother's apartment. Ricardo soon came in, according to his habit. After a few moments of conversation, Doña Gertrudis went off to sleep, and the two young people retired to a nook in the window to tell each other the sweet every-day secrets, which are sweeter and more delicious the more they are repeated. Maria was preoccupied; her betrothed, with the quickness of one who truly loves, instantly noticed it.

“What ails you to-day? . . . it seems to me that you are troubled . . .”

“I feel sad, Ricardo . . . I feel sad, as though some misfortune were hurrying on me.”

“It's your nerves, which are overtaxed, dear . . . Fasts greatly weaken you. You ought to stop them for a while, as well as so many hours of prayer . . . You are weakening yourself very much . . .”

“On the contrary, I have never felt so well as I have

lately. It is not my nerves, but a genuine sadness . . . It is my soul that suffers, and not my body."

"But have you any reason for being melancholy?"

"I have a presentiment."

"But who cares for presentiments?"

Maria kept silent, and Ricardo also. It was the twilight hour; both gazed steadily out of the window, upon the great plaza of Nieva, surrounded by its arcades, where the boys who had been let out of school were amusing themselves, running and shouting. The sun was already down, leaving above the tiled roof of the town-hall¹ a wide stretch of sky slightly tinted with rose, which took bluish shades toward the zenith, and yellow toward the horizon. The people of the town were hurrying through the streets, attending to the last duties of the day, and enjoying the sweet gloaming. Such an evening was rare. The balconies of the Café de la Estrella were occupied by a few customers, who were casting their restless eyes around the plaza. On the balcony of the opposite house a little boy, with blue eyes and light, curly hair, was having a good time with a wooden pipe, blowing soap-bubbles. Several ragamuffins below, with no little chatter, caught them as they floated down, bursting them with their hats and handkerchiefs.

After a while, Maria turned to her betrothed, and fixing upon him an intense, anxious look, said, with trembling voice, —

"Ricardo, do you love me much?"

"Why do you ask me that question? . . . Don't you know that I do?"

"Yes, I know that you love me . . . You have already given me proof of it . . . but in love, as in everything not

¹ *casas consistoriales*.

transitory in this world, there is always a more and less . . . Only divine love is infinite . . . The love that you bear me has stood certain proofs; who knows if it could stand others?"

"The love which I have for thee," said the young marquis, placing his hand on his heart, "has power to stand all proofs."

"All?"

"All."

"Even if I were to ask you your life? . . ."

"Bah! bah!" replied the young man, shrugging his shoulders with gesture of disdain, "that would be to ask very little."

Maria smiled with satisfaction, and after a pause, demanded timidly, —

"And if I asked your honor . . . or what you men understand by honor? . . ." she added, correcting herself.

Ricardo, slightly pale, arose to his feet, and hesitated some time before he replied. At last he said in a low tone, calmly: —

"Honor, my love, is not our own possession; it is a trust which heaven places in our hands at birth, demanding account of it when we die."

A flash of indignation and scorn passed through Maria's eyes, as she heard those words.

"And who has told you¹ what heaven grants you or asks of you, and why do you mix heaven with things that oftentimes pertain to hell?"

But calming herself in an instant, and giving her words a sweet, persuasive tone, she added: —

"What heaven confides to man at birth nothing can reveal except religion, and religion tells us that man not

¹ *vosotros*, not *te*.

seldom counts his honor in what he ought to look upon as his ruin and destruction . . . Generally what the world most appreciates and thirsts for goes against God's law . . . Therefore we ought to make very little account of this pretended honor with which pride and haughtiness are cloaked. The true honor of the Christian consists only in serving God, and obeying His holy commands . . . Listen, Ricardo . . . I asked you if you loved me much for the reason that it was imperative for me to know . . . to know with absolute and entire certainty . . . I am going to make you a confession, after which, if you are as noble and have as much faith as I may demand of you, perhaps you will love me more than ever; . . . but if your faith is frail and vacillating, and you pay tribute to the frivolous considerations of the world, you will surely love me less, and possibly you will even desert me . . .”

“Never that!”

“Wait a moment . . . Imagine that your betrothed, neglecting and even violating certain rules laid down by society, and overstepping the limits always set for woman, especially when she is an unmarried girl, mingles in actions that are purely masculine; . . . for example, in politics, . . . and not only mingles in them with thought and word, but actually takes an active part in them. Imagine her to enter into a conspiracy, and work with ardor for the triumph of her cause, . . . and put her life or her liberty at stake to accomplish it . . .”

“What, you? . . .”

“Yes,” replied Maria, with resolution. “I have entered with all my heart into a conspiracy . . . I am working with all my might and main for the triumph of the cause of the righteous . . . God knows well that it makes no difference to me whether one set of men or another rule

over us, and that no earthly consideration has tempted me to such a step. But I have seen, and I still see religion and the ministry of religion, abused ; I see the salvation of many souls endangered, I see every day the divine Jesus and his sweet name made a mockery by the impious men who chance to rule in Spain, wearing a crown of thorns a thousand times more grievous than what he bore at Jerusalem . . . and I feel that his eyes implore me and I hear his celestial voice begging me to lift that terrible crown a little . . . Do you think that I can weigh against the sublime interests of religion, the safety of my soul, and the glory of Jesus, the childish fear of displeasing the world ? ”

“ I know nothing about it,” replied Ricardo, in a dull voice, buried in deep thought.

“ You see how I was right ! Now that I have confessed to you and told you my secret, your love already grows dim, and you certainly will soon drift away from me and abandon me ! ”

The young girl’s last word caused Ricardo to lift his head quickly. He had a presentiment that something serious was at hand, and he replied in a tone of ill humor, —

“ And what is it that has moved you to confide to me all these things, which you have kept so secret till now ? ”

“ Before all, forgive me for not having confided in you before . . . They were secrets that did not belong to me . . . Besides, I imagined that you would not think as I did, and would raise some objection to my plans . . . But now you have greatly changed : you are more religious, and you love the name of Christian which you bear . . . Therefore I decided to open my soul entirely before you, and to put into your trusty, honest hands the

lives of many noble-souled men . . . I am very weak, Ricardo mio ; I am only a poor girl, incapable of struggling and resisting ; . . . a shadow makes me tremble, . . . a word startles me and moves me to the very depths of my being . . . My eyes are more accustomed to shed tears than to direct imperious glances, and my hands are folded with more pleasure than they are raised in anger . . . I have no cunning to avoid impositions, or fortitude to endure pain . . . I can do nothing, . . . nothing, . . . and I am filled with despair ; but thou art brave, thou art noble, and thou art generous . . . I can rely on thee as the bird in the air, and thanks to thee, win heaven . . . These moments are supreme for me . . . I feel as though I was near the abyss, and I have no power to stay my steps . . . If thou dost not reach me out thy hand, thou wilt very soon see me plunging into it . . . Ricardo mio, do not abandon me, . . . for God's sake do not abandon me ! . . .”

The young man felt that the danger was nearer than ever, and exclaimed,—

“ Let us have it done with at once. Maria. Let us know what it is all about.”

“ It is about a great act of merit which you can accomplish toward your salvation if you will abandon the wicked suggestions of the world and listen to the invitation of heaven . . . In this town there is a mighty weapon which, instead of serving God, as everything in this world ought to serve Him, is an awful auxiliary of the devil. This weapon is the gun factory . . .” Maria stopped a moment, and then, casting a frightened look at her lover, continued in a trembling voice : “ You can snatch this weapon from the evil one and restore it into the hands of God by delivering it over to the defenders of religion and —”

Maria stopped a second time, and looked with horror at the livid, contracted face of the young marquis, who grasped her by the arm, and shaking her violently, roared, rather than spoke:—

“Who suggested to you the idea of proposing *that* to me? . . . Answer me . . . Who was the vile, low wretch who advised you to do it? . . . I’ll go myself this very instant and tear out his tongue for him! Tell me, tell me, Maria! . . . This thought never originated with you . . . You couldn’t have supposed that your lover, the Marquis of Peñalta, the descendant of so many noble gentlemen, a soldier of honor and loyalty, could calmly listen to such a proposition! . . . You couldn’t have imagined that the man who adored you was a cowardly traitor, whom his comrades would justly laugh to scorn. . . . Only thus can I pardon the horrible words which you have just spoken . . . Listen for God’s sake! Maria . . . Just now my brain is on fire and my heart is torn . . . I hear within me a voice which prophesies my ruin, misfortune . . . Yet still, at this moment I tell you that I love thee with all my soul . . . Even to the point of giving my life for thee gladly; . . . but if the love which I have for thee were multiplied a thousand fold, and were not to be gratified in this world, I would blot it out, I would blot it out as a light is blotted out by a breath,—and I would remain all my life long a beggar, sooner than consent to such villany . . . What am I saying? . . . If God himself came down to propose that to me, and threatened me with the eternal torments of hell, I would refuse . . . I would prefer to be damned with the loyal than be saved with traitors.”

Maria hung her head in consternation. After a little time she succeeded in saying in a weak voice:—

"You do not understand me, Ricardo, nor do I understand you any better. In judging of the things of this world we put ourselves at very opposite points of view: you look through the glass of the conventions established by men, and I only through that of the law of God. For you the renown of bravery, the reputation of being loyal and noble, is the first thing; for me the main thing is the salvation of my soul . . . Pardon me if I have offended you, and let this *honor* which you worship so fervently serve you to forget forever what we have been talking about."

Ricardo gave the girl a long, sad look. He had just learned once and for all that that woman could never be his; that he held only a very subordinate place in that idolatrous heart, so full of mysterious sentiments, grand and sublime, perhaps, but incomprehensible for him. A tear sprang into his eyes and rolled tremblingly down his cheeks.

"You are right, Maria . . . I don't understand you . . . My father was a man of honor, and he also could not have understood you . . . My grandfather was a soldier who lost his life in the defence of his country, and he, too, would not have understood you any better . . . But my father and my grandfather would have felt insulted, as I feel insulted, that any one should remind them that they ought to keep secrets confided to them."

Both maintained a protracted silence, gazing sadly through the panes upon the great plaza of Nieva, which began to be concealed under the gathering shades of night. The passers-by were going to their homes with slow and lazy gait. A few lights were already burning in the depths of the houses. The ragamuffins, who had been laboriously catching the soap-bubbles sent out to

them by the boy in the opposite house, had disappeared, and he, tired of blowing through his pipe, finally flung it to the ground together with his bowl of soap-suds, and set himself making faces at Ricardo and Maria ; but they, solemn and motionless, paid no attention, as on other occasions, and the child, surprised to find them so serious, likewise remained motionless, staring at them with his bright, beautiful, cherub eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH ARE TOLD THE LABORS OF A CHRISTIAN
VIRGIN.

THE general commander kept by the fickle Spanish republic in the province of * * * was a good deal of a barbarian, — be it said without intention of hitting him too hard, for every man has the right to be as much of a barbarian as he finds consistent with sound morals and good habits. The first thing that he did, as soon as it was breathed to him that the Carlists of Nieva were getting ready for a surprise (*algarada*, battering-ram, was what he called it), and intended nothing less than to get possession of the gun factory, was to summon the commandant Ramírez and say to him: —

“Within an hour you must start for Nieva with two companies, together with the inspector of police, and as soon as you get there, you arrest and bring to me lashed arm to arm — do you understand? — lashed arm to arm, all the individuals who are put down on this paper.”

“’Tis well, my brigadier!”

“It will not need more than half a company to guard them. You, with the rest of the force, put yourselves under command of the colonel-director until I make other arrangements.”

“’Tis well, my brigadier!”

As the commandant Ramírez, having made his salute, was going out of the office door, the brigadier called him back, —

"Harkee, Ramírez, how did I tell you to bring the prisoners?"

"Lashed arm to arm, my brigadier."

"Correct; God go with you!"

The night on which the two companies reached Nieva was the one chosen by Don César's friends to sound the battle-cry and seize the factory. The conspiracy was well planned. At one o'clock in the morning fifty men were to meet in the garden of a rich Carlist proprietor, and fifty more in the wine-cellar of another, to arm and equip themselves. At two precisely they were all to march against the factory, the guard of which, at this time under command of the young Marqués de Peñalta, did not exceed twenty-five men, and attack it ostensibly at the doors, while others should scale the walls in the rear. Once inside they would quickly seize upon the arms already manufactured, loading them upon mules which were in readiness, set fire to the workshops, and haste away from the town. In case they should be attacked, they expected to raise easily five or six hundred men well provided with arms and ammunition. Don César had no doubt of the success of his enterprise, but the cursed bird¹ traditional in all conspiracies, past and to come, upset the brave caballero's project. At eleven o'clock that evening the commandant Ramírez and the inspector of police had possession of all the individuals of the committee, and ten or a dozen of the most outspoken Carlists of Nieva, who, tied together and under the guard of half of a company, according to the orders of the general commander, were under the arcade of the town-hall, waiting the order of march. The only woman among these was Maria. In vain did Don Mariano, with tears in his eyes, beg the leader of the force to let him take her in a car-

¹ *soplo*: literally breath.

riage. The commandant Ramírez declared that he was deeply grieved at not being able to gratify him, and that the only thing that he could do, out of respect for him, was to give her parole-leave and wait a few moments until she procured thick footwear and suitable outside garments, though to do this exposed him to the wrath of the brigadier who . . . (and here the commandant Ramírez employed the term which we have already had the honor of applying to him).

At last the order was given, and the lieutenant set out on the march with the prisoners. Don Mariano would not leave his daughter. Though it did not rain at that particular moment, the night was very damp and the roads truly abominable, as was proved by the spatter-dashes of the soldiers. In the town almost everybody was aware of what was going on, and many dark, silent forms filled the balconies, straining their eyes to see the prisoners pass by. As they went through a certain street, an angry female voice cried from a balcony, —

“Villains, you will pay for all these things in hell!”

The soldiers lifted their heads and dropped them again, silently proceeding on their march, the measured sound of which inspired melancholy and fear. They all felt on their caps a steady broadside of looks of hatred, which, notwithstanding their innocence, they received with the resignation of those accustomed to suffering injustice. They soon left the last houses of the town and entered the high-road, the first stretches of which were adorned with lofty poplars. The sky was still dark and thick, wrapping the earth in darkness. Scarcely could they see the trunks of the neighboring trees, or the shapes of the houses or farm buildings along the roadside. The feet of the company no longer produced the sharp clatter

which they made when they were walking over the paved streets, but a muffled sound still more sad. The lieutenant, a pretty good-natured young fellow of twenty, ordered the soldiers to march in parallel columns, with the prisoners in the middle. Then he approached the latter, and asking them if he could do anything for them, apologized courteously for taking them bound together, but they must understand that the brigadier was somewhat of a . . . (the young lieutenant made use of the same expression which his commandant, and we as well, has already applied to him). The prisoners muttered their thanks and relapsed into a dignified silence. Soon it began to rain furiously. Don Mariano, who had not exchanged a word with his daughter, hastily spread his umbrella to shelter her, and held her long pressed to his heart, whispering in her ear:—

“My daughter, what a bitter trial you are giving me! . . . Wrap yourself up well! . . . Are you cold? oh, that obstinate brute shall answer me for this! . . . I will go to Madrid and see the Minister of War, and have him sent to prison! . . . Does the rain reach you anywhere, sweetheart mine¹? Do you want my waterproof? . . . To send and have my daughter pinioned! . . . Oh, the confounded pig! in what sty did this farcical government find him! . . . If you get sick, I will kill him without a moment's hesitation . . . But you, silly girl, who inveigled you into this pack of conspirators without my permission? . . . If I had not let you wander about so much among these churches, you would not at this time be suffering such trials . . . What have you to do with Carlists or with Republicans? . . . A well-educated girl stays quietly at home, looking after her father's shirts and knitting

¹ *corazón mío.*

stockings . . . Do you hear? . . . knitting stockings! . . . The beast! wretch! to send and take my daughter pinioned! . . . If I see him, I won't promise not to seize him by the throat . . . ”

“Calm yourself, papa, . . . calm yourself, for Heaven's sake. I am perfectly comfortable . . . When one suffers for God the suffering is turned into pleasure . . . Never did I feel better than at this moment . . . and it is because I feel in my soul the consolation of having done something to restore Jesus to his holy kingdom . . . The only thing that makes me suffer, is to see you unhappy . . . Ay! papa, what wouldn't I give to have your faith as living and ardent as mine, so that you would despise all the pains of earth, and march calm and content, as I am marching, whither God may wish to take me!”

Don Mariano felt a torrent of sharp, angry words choking him, but he could not give them utterance. All that he did was to wrap his waterproof around his daughter, emitting a sort of grunt significantly eloquent.

It ceased to rain at last. A slight breath of south-west wind made itself felt, and the thick mantle over the sky began to thin away, letting through a slender, feeble light which brought out the silhouettes of the soldiers, and the trees, and the enormous forms of the mountains girding the valley. The silence in the band was sepulchral. The prisoners exchanged not a single word, devouring their rage and grief. In the country, likewise, was heard none of those pleasant sounds that increase the mystery of the night, and fill the soul with soft melancholy. Only as they passed in front of some house, they heard within the threatening bark of a dog, protesting against the march of troops at such an unusual hour, and, now and then, the no less gentle muttering of Ser-

geant Alcares as he cursed the night, and his luck, the mother who bore him.

The wind kept blowing stronger and stronger, a moist wind which the prisoners took to be of sufficient evil import. The trees, lining the sides of the road, twisted, as though in agony, scattering all the rain down with which they were laden. In the feeble light of the sky the forms of the huge, black clouds began to appear, rushing swiftly through the air, as though closely pursued by some monster of the night. Back of these clouds the faint blue of the firmament could not be seen, but a thick mantle of gray, seemingly impenetrable. Nevertheless, the wind, still increasing in violence, began at last to rupture it in a few places, making beautiful rents in the depths of which could be seen the soft light of some star. The great, black clouds swept over them and blotted them out, but the mantle was constantly rifted again in other places, and the little stars once more tipped friendly winks to the earth. At last a great burst of silvery light suddenly bathed the whole landscape; the moon had come out between two clouds, fair and splendid as a virgin who opens the windows of her chamber. But hardly had she cast one look of curiosity at our band, when the rude clouds drew together, binding her in a fillet over her eyes, and leaving the earth gloomy and dark. Again she appeared on high, and once more was hidden, as she saw a hurrying legion of clouds in every form and shape, flying to unknown regions, passing before her face. In the space of half an hour, she presented and hid herself an incredible number of times, seeming to the eyes of the pilgrims like a ship ready to sink in some restless, stormy ocean.

Finally the tempest of the sky grew calm. Slowly

thick cloud masses, which spotted the face of the sky, had disappeared behind the mountains. A few, which still remained, and at long intervals, passing across the moon, left the earth in darkness, likewise hid the mountain-peaks. And the sky was left clear and bright, spreading out its dark mantle adorned with stars. The moon traced a luminous circle around her, in which, like a haughty queen, she let no other star shed his light. The wide valley seemed to quiver gently with joy at feeling the kiss of her silvery beams, and sent forth from the orange groves, and the quiet streams, and the white hamlets scattered here and there, millions of reflections vanishing with gentle mystery in the air. In some places great, luminous sheets stretched out, where could be seen with wonderful clearness the outlines of trees and fences; in others, clustered shadows, guarding the dreams of flowers. The broad valley, when thus illumined, had the semblance of a sleeping lake.

After tramping along for a considerable time through the midst of the valley, our band struck into the mountains girting it. It was necessary to cross them to reach the plain surrounding * * *. The highway followed the most accessible places, skirting the side of one of the mountains with a pretty decided slope. The horizon widened wonderfully. As they began to climb, the lieutenant commanded a halt before a huge tavern, situated near the highway, and sending to the landlord obliged him to arise and provide his people with food. The prisoners went into the house and rested some time. Then they set forth once more, calmly climbing the sharp declivity.

The exuberant vegetation of the valley had ceased. The mountains, which constantly shut them in closer, leaving barely room for the highway, were clad only in

ferns. From time to time they came upon the opening of some coal mine, dug near the road. Don Mariano could not resist the temptation of talking about the railway to Nieva, and he approached the lieutenant and showed him where the line from Sotolonga was going, explaining in full the advantages which it had over the line from Miramar. The pathway was now considerably drier on account of the hillside, and the moon from on high still lighted up the way, and fixed her sweet, calm gaze on the pilgrims. The notes of a guitar were heard. When did the guitar ever cease to sound during a march of Spanish soldiers? And a voice of heroic timbre sang in the accents of the South:—

*“ Como cosita propia
Te miraba yo
Te miraba yo ;
Pero quererte como te quería
Eso se acabó
Eso se acabó.”*

Four or five soldiers scattered here and there likewise showed their southern origin by shouting at the end of the strophe, *Olé, olé!* That song, born in the warm soil of Andalucia, was a magic wand which banished sadness from all hearts. The stern mountains, as though possessed by a sudden sympathy, re-echoed the soldier's voice, carrying it far away across its gorges and ravines. Lively conversation arose in the company, stopping every time that the Andalusian soldier struck up a new verse. The prisoners persisted in their obstinate silence. All marched negligently, with mouths open, instinctively enjoying the favorable change which the night had undergone. Suddenly, as they were ascending one of the nu-

merous turns in the road, in the roughest part of the divide, the report of a musket was heard. A soldier dropped to the ground. Almost at the same time the portentous cry of *¡ Viva Carlos Septimo !* was hurled into space. Lifting their heads, all saw at no great distance, standing on one of the rocks commanding the road, a man with long, white mustachios, dressed in a sheepskin *zumarra* and Basque cap.¹ The prisoners instantly recognized in him the president of the committee, Don César Pardo. The lieutenant ordered the men to close up, fearing an ambuscade, and gave the command to fire; but the volley had no result. When the smoke cleared away Don César was still seen calmly reloading his gun. As he fired it, he cried again with still more fury, —

“ *¡ Viva Carlos Septimo !* ”

“ May the lightning strike you, you old fox ; you have spoiled my arm for me,” exclaimed Sergeant Alcaez, raising his hand to the wound.

“ Second column, aim ! fire ! ” shouted the lieutenant.

This time there was no better result. Don César fired again, crying, —

“ *¡ Viva la religión !* ”

Then the lieutenant angrily gave the command, —

“ Fire as you please ! ”

An incessant crackling of musketry followed from the half company, drawn up in battle array ; but the solitary enemy neither retreated nor fell. Standing on the rock, without even deigning to shelter himself behind it, he steadily loaded and fired his musket, always repeating in a terrible voice, —

“ *¡ Viva Carlos Septimo ! ¡ Viva la religión !* ”

He rarely fired without causing some loss in the com-

¹ *boina.*

pany. The hawk illuminated his proud, fierce face loaded with wrinkles, and gave it a fantastic appearance. His eyes gleamed like those of a madman, and his tall, lusty frame shone in the luminous atmosphere, like that of a supernatural being who had come down to punish criminals who had sinned against heaven.

"Do you know me, republicans, do you know me?" he cried, without ceasing to fire. "I am Don César the old Christian and a Carlist from head to foot."

"You're a scoundrel," replied a soldier.

"Hearkee, little fellow; you're all of a tremble, and the balls you shoot go wide of the mark."

"Try this one then!"

"No, sir! . . . it didn't hit . . . If I had ten men with me how you would all scatter, you lapdogs!"

"Do what you please, boys! . . . Kill that whelp!" cried the lieutenant at the height of irritation.

The soldiers broke for the mountain, and began to climb it with the agility of wildcats. The rage which possessed them redoubled their powers. But at the same time the lieutenant, snatching a musket from one of the soldiers, levelled at Don César and brought him down.

"That'll do, boys! . . . Come back! . . . the hawk is winged at last," he cried in triumphant accents.

"It only wounded my leg; . . . my bill is whole yet," replied the ringleader, with hoarse voice.

And in truth, though his hip was shot through, he managed to raise himself up and load his musket, which he instantly fired at those who were coming up against him. They roared with rage as they pulled themselves up by the ferns, or dug their fingers into the moss to climb faster.

"Come, come, you cowards," screamed Don César,

likewise maddened with rage. "Come and learn how to fight! . . . You see how a Carlist officer makes war! . . . You see how he is equal to fifty republicans! . . . Tomorrow tell your exploit to General Bum Bum who sent you! . . . Let 'em give you the laurel wreath, you heroes! Now here goes a shot for Don Carlos! . . . Ah! I know how you are taking off a girl as prisoner, you brave warriors of the republic! . . . Here goes another for Doña Margarita! . . . Did the pill taste bad, eh, fellow? . . . Oh, how glad I am to see you! ; *Viva Carlos!* . . ."

He was not allowed to finish. A soldier who had reached the summit put the muzzle of his gun to his forehead and blew off his head, saying, —

"Die, you hog!"

He killed him without heeding the voices of his comrades, who said, "Leave him for me! Leave him for me!"

As they reached them with pale cheeks and bloodshot eyes, they all discharged their guns at the lifeless body of the terrible ringleader, quickly destroying it in the most horrible manner. When that act of barbarism, inspired by wrath, was accomplished, the soldiers remained silent. Their irritation being calmed, they began to realize how they had been fighting with one single man, and they were dissatisfied with themselves. In spite of themselves they felt stirred to admiration.

"The old man had gall," said one, as he wiped off a few drops of blood which had splattered into his face.

"He was well quit of his life," declared a second.

"The truth is, that taking them one at a time, that old man would have swallowed this whole division, uniform and all," said a third, finally; and no one uttered a protest.

In the company there were one killed and five wounded,

as the result of the skirmish. They placed them all, as well as they could, on improvised stretchers, and again took up the line of march. Not only the soldiers, but the prisoners, plodded on in silence and melancholy, profoundly impressed by the tragic event which had just occurred.

The night was still as calm and bright as before, and in the zenith the moon, which had just been lighting that unequal combat with her soft poetic beams, still shed them upon the company slowly ascending the highway, and upon the livid, dismembered corpse which they had left behind on the crag. The struggles, the joys, the griefs of us poor devils who creep on the earth, what worth have they? what do they signify before the august serenity of the heavens? For them the fall of an empire and the fall of a leaf are of equal consequence; for them the sigh of a maiden in love and the groan of a dying man are alike in sound. "Nature is deaf," said the great Leopardi, "and cannot pity."

But Maria walked along with her eyes fixed on the sky, regarding it with far different thoughts. There where the poet found nothing but a blind will, incapable of good, the pious girl saw a foreseeing and merciful God, as merciful as terrible, who received the good into his bosom, and sent the wicked to eternal torment — a God, who, like ourselves, was appeased by prayers and tears. Maria felt stirred as she thought of the fate which awaited him who had just died would meet in presence of his justice, and by a quick, spontaneous movement of her heart, she said in a loud, clear voice: —

"For the soul of the departed Don César. . . . Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." The prisoners began to pray with fervor.

Some of the soldiers did the same. Then they relapsed into silence as they marched along, and nothing was heard but the sound of labored breathing, and occasionally the complaints of the wounded, not very well accommodated in their litters. At last they crossed the highest point of the watershed, and began to descend toward the wide valley of * * *. The dawn was already appearing in the confines of the east. The dull blue of the sky in that quarter was fading into a pale, melancholy light, which at the same time blotted out the sparkling stars. The travellers felt a chill, unpleasant breath of wind which turned their noses and hands purple. Very soon a great golden fringe spread over the eastern hills, and the band could regard at their pleasure the valley stretching out at their feet, where the green of the meadows and the yellow of the plowed lands shone in multitudinous tones, coarse or soft, like a rich mantle of brocade. A few tufts of cloud were slowly rising from the depths of the streamlets which furrowed it; and yonder, in the west, a great curtain of black mountains, on whose summits the snow still gleamed white, shut it in abruptly, casting across it a great mantle of shadow. In spite of this shadow, the eyes of the travellers who knew the region could distinguish in the very edge of the black curtain the spire of the proud tower of the cathedral of * * *. The prisoners and their guards reached the plain, and crossed the valley from one end to the other, expending much time in the transit, principally because of the care required by the wounded. Finally, at eight o'clock in the morning, they reached the first houses of the suburb of * * *.

The inhabitants of the capital had heard of the sudden blow struck by the military governor against the Carlists of Nieva, and a great throng, collected in the streets, was

impatiently waiting to see the prisoners pass by. It was composed almost entirely of what, during the revolutionary period, was called the sovereign people; that is, of all the ragamuffins and rough-scuff of the city, together with quite a number of respectable people, though loungers, and almost all the *ladies* of the suburbs.

On seeing the band from afar, the multitude was stirred teempestuously, and there arose a dull, universal clamor:—

“There they are now! There they are now!”—
“I was told that they intended to assassinate all the liberals of Nieva last night.”—“Ah! the rascals! Fortunate they fell beforehand into the trap!”

“They must be undeceived,” declared a fat and highly-colored caballero, with a good-natured face; “all the Carlists are either rascals or fools. I would not employ any other means with them than extermination . . . Fire and sword!”

“Let us sing them *El trágula* when they pass,” said a ragged lad to two other swells accompanying him.

The people pressed close as the band approached, those who could finding standing-room on the street-walls and the trees along the way. On seeing the wounded, and learning through the curt account of some soldier about the incident of Don César, the inquisitive citizens felt justified in manifesting their indignation, and though at first they contented themselves with giving each other the benefit of their hostile thoughts, finally they began to belch forth against the prisoners furious insults, apostrophizing them in loud tones, as though they had all received from their hands some wrong. Thus they continued escorting them through the streets of the city, their fury and indignation ever on the increase, until words were

THE LABORS OF A CHRISTIAN

not enough to satisfy them. The prisoners had sunken heads and flushed faces.

"Oh, you hypocrites! saint-killers!" they cried; "may the day soon come when we strung up!"

"See how those cursed rascals hang their heads! they had us in their fists the meanest of them would be happier."

"Now cry 'Long live Carlos Seventh,' you rubbish!" But the popular fury was most madly excited against Maria. Neither her youth, nor her beauty, nor her weakness, served to spare her from ferocious, filthy insults.

"Who is that woman with 'em? They say she's a saint." — "Yes, a saint, but she's a loose character!" — "See here, wench, if you are hunting for a husband, you'll find one here!" — "That one needs a few dozen lashes!" — "See what hypocritical eyes the harridan² has!"

It is easy to appreciate the state of disturbance, wrath, anguish, and excitement which overmastered Don Mariano Elorza, at being obliged to listen to these rude remarks. In his impotent rage he bit his hands and stopped his ears, fearing that his blood would boil over and lead him to do something endangering his daughter's life.

As we have already said, the crowd, not content with flinging insults, took it into their heads to indulge in brutal treatment of them. One rough youth gave the example by hurling a piece of orange. Many others followed his example, and there fell on the unfortunate prisoners a hailstorm of projectiles, more disgusting, it must be confessed than deadly. However, a cabbage

¹ *tunantes*.

² *pendanga*.

RQUIS OF PEÑALTA.

ly, hit Maria in the face and made

happy Don Mariano's fury burst forth, as the sea in its moments of tempest, in eruption. His athletic figure fell upon the loungers nearest him, and he annihilated his onslaught, scattering the men on the ground though they had been made of straw; those left on their feet fled without awaiting a second attack. The Señor de Elorza would have made his way through the whole crowd, but meeting with resistance in the serried ranks, he grasped the throat of the first ruffian at hand and would have surely choked him to death, had not the soldiers come to his aid and pushed back the angry father. His wrath then broke out in a storm of frenzied words, which brought the throng to silence.

"Guttersnipes! vile guttersnipes! cowards! beasts! . . . If they had not prevented me, I would have pulled your tongues out, one at a time . . . You have wounded my daughter . . . Didn't you know she was my daughter, you rascals! Here you showed your valor . . . bullies! why don't you go to Navarra to fight with the Moors, instead of attacking the defenceless? . . . Because you are cowards! . . . An indecent rabble that ought to be scattered with whips! If there be among you any one worthy of meeting me, let him come out so that I can spit in his face . . . Let go of me, let go of me, for God's sake! Let me kill one of these pimps who have wounded my daughter. Let me go, señores, let me go! . . ."

Don Mariano struggled to tear himself from the arms of the soldiers. The rabble who had fallen back from his attack, seeing him in custody, recovered from their alarm, and crowded back again like basilisks, foaming at the mouth with rage.

"This old coxcomb insults the people!" — "He's a crazy fool!" — "It's a shame for the people to be so insulted!" — "Why don't you kill this knave!" — "Kill him, yes, kill him!" — "Kill him!" — "Kill him!"

And the throng pressed up to the band closer and closer, though slowly, like an ocean of waves swelling and threatening, and would soon have put an end to Don Mariano and the prisoners, had not the lieutenant prevented such an act of barbarism by shouting at the top of his voice, —

"Attention, company — ready — aim!"

Then the swelling waves subsided as by magic. The lieutenant's voice was Neptune's *sed motos prestat componere fluctus*. The sovereign people turned tail, and saying in their hearts "escape if you can," started to run in all directions, tripping up here, and scrambling to feet again there. And it is reported that His Majesty ran so fast and so far, that in less than three minutes he disappeared from before the guns of the military.

Thanks to this, the prisoners were left in peace until they reached the prison, where they were lodged in a great hall, filthy enough, with a wooden floor, filled with rat-holes in many places. Maria was assigned a separate room, comparatively clean and comfortable.

The hour set for the hearing before the council of war was twelve o'clock; and when the clock struck, the prisoners, perfectly guarded, were transferred to a handsomely decorated salon in the building where it met. The officers composing it were seated behind a long table, covered with red damask trimmed with gold lace, under a velvet canopy which, in other times, before we had the republic, had served to give regality and prestige to the portrait of the king. The presiding officer was the mil-

itary governor, who was anxious to have done with the business in a rapid and violent manner. He wished to inflict exemplary punishment upon all of the conspirators, or, what is the same thing, "not to leave a mannikin with his head on," to use his own words. He was a chubby man, with great blub-cheeks and a thin mustache: a perfect image of what we, and likewise the Commandant Ramírez, and the lieutenant of the convoy, have already called him. The other officers had absolutely nothing remarkable in their faces: coarse features, black eyes, twisted mustachios, sharp-pointed goatees, commonplace faces, on the whole, though manly. At first sight, it was evident that they wore their togas broad. When the prisoners entered, the doors and the standing-room of the building were invaded by a great crowd, not so dense and low as that of the morning; it was made up of people of more respectability, — students for the most part, *profesores*, and officeholders. This throng preserved a thoughtful, compassionate silence at seeing them enter.

They were introduced one at a time in the great hall of state. The captain, who acted as prosecutor,¹ took the depositions, having before him documents in proof of the crime. The members of the Carlist committee of Valencia gave their testimony as best suited their ideas of propriety, denying the majority of the counts, astutely pleading alibi to others, and, in fine, doing all in their power to get off easily. The fat-cheeked brigadier lost his temper a few times during the course of the hearing, intending to the prosecutor to launch harsh apostrophes at the prisoners, and threatening to have them shot in the interval, if they did not reveal all the minutiae and ramifications of the conspiracy; but he accomplished little by his incoher-

¹ *fiscal*.

tions. When Maria's turn came, he smiled sarcastically, and said with rough irony, —

“Have the goodness to draw near, señorita, and to reply to the questions which this caballero capitán will put to you.”

“What is your name?” asked the prosecutor.

“Maria de Elorza y Valcárcel.”

“*De, dee, dee,*” snorted the brigadier, “always the same aristocratic pretensions!”

“You are accused of serving as intermediary in the correspondence between the Marqués de Revollar, Don Carlos's minister and counsellor, and the ringleader, Don César Pardo, lately exiled by virtue of sentence of the counsel of war, which met on the 14th of March. Moreover, you are accused of having been present as an active participant at various meetings held by the conspirators of Nieva, with the assistance of the same ringleaders who escaped, and various other political criminals. In these meetings you have indulged in speech fomenting rebellion, and making suggestions to help its success. It is said that you embroidered the banner for the rebels, and have hidden hats and spatterdashes in your house, and likewise have procured money for the conspirators . . .”

The prosecutor stopped speaking. There were a few instants of silence. The brigadier impatiently said, — “Come . . . Reply! Are the deeds of which you stand accused true?”

Maria, with her clear gaze fastened on the president's supercilious face, replied in firm, calm accents: —

“All that the Señor Fiscal has just set forth is pure truth, and I take the warmest pride in it. It is true that I have served as intermediary in the correspondence between my noble uncle, the Marqués de Revollar, and the brave

Don César Pardo (whom may God take to glory!). It is certain that I have been present at the meetings, where a conspiracy was planned against the impious government now existing, and that I have endeavored, with my feeble speech, to stir the conspirators to the combat, and it is equally certain that I embroidered the banner and other articles for the defenders of the faith. It is likewise true that I have furnished all the money that I could, but it is not enough to say that I hid in my father's house hats and spatterdashes: I have also hidden arms, muskets, and their bayonets and ammunition."

The officers of the council were stupefied. The brigadier himself, in spite of his choleric temper, remained for some instants dumb before the girl's audacity. But if they had known her as we know her, it is certain that they would not have had reason to be surprised. The eldest daughter of the Elorzas had entered into the Carlist conspiracy, completely persuaded that she was accomplishing a work very grateful in the eyes of God, and she had firmly determined not to turn back before any danger. Her ardent, all-powerful faith was eager to find means to serve Him, and moreover the longing for imitation, for which we have already given her credit, impelled her to imitate the conduct of those sainted virgins who fought against the power of the cruellest tyrants, and gave a glorious example of constancy in times of persecution. She knew by heart the lives of Saint Leocadia, Saint Barbara, Saint Julia, Saint Eulalia, and other illustrious martyrs of the Christian faith, and their steadfastness was for her an example and further incentive in the road to sanctity upon which she had entered. Countless times she had imagined scenes of martyrdom in which she was the principal personage, and in which she had always come

forth conqueror ; just as many men fond of battles, dream that they are fighting with a dozen champions and making them run ignominiously, and others enamored of oratory represent themselves as speaking before multitudes, moving them and carrying them away by their eloquence. With what admiration had she read about the flight of the sainted maiden of Merida, from the battlefield of her fathers to the city where she presented herself voluntarily before the governor Calfurniano to confess her faith, and ask a martyr's death ! In the march which she had just made from Nieva, she had many times recalled the details of that memorable flight, gladly seeing in it a certain analogy with that of the saint. Now that she saw herself in the presence of stern, angry judges, she found the resemblance still more striking, and this encouraged her, in no small degree, in her determination to stand firm in spite of danger.

The brigadier, who was not very well informed in regard to what had happened to Saint Eulalia at the hands of Calfurniano, believed honestly that the silly girl was ridiculing him, and, giving a tremendous rap on the table with his fist, he shouted :—

“ Listen, señorita, do you know with whom you are talking ? Do you know that I am the military governor of the province, and that I have never had any decided fondness for jests ? Do you know what risk you run at making sport of this most dignified council of war, over which at this moment I preside ? Do you know that I have a mind to send you to prison, and shut you up in a cell, and keep you there on bread and water until you rotted ? Did you know it ? heh ! . . . Did you know it ? heh ! . . . heh ? . . . heh ? . . . ”

“ I know perfectly,” replied Maria in steady, but

modest tone, "that I am in the presence of a council of war; but, though I were facing a battalion of soldiers, aiming at me with their guns, I should say the same thing without dropping or adding a letter. I am not accustomed to tell falsehoods, and when it concerns acts which may be some service to the cause of God, I should be unworthy of calling myself a Christian, if I denied them in the presence of any one."

"And what is it that you call the cause of God, my beautiful señorita?" asked the brigadier with apparent calmness, while his eyes flashed lightnings of wrath.

"I call the cause of God that which is at the present time represented by the legitimate and Catholic king, around whom are collected all those who feel scandalized to see religion persecuted and its ministers molested; those who mourn at seeing the infamous blasphemies uttered in Congress, and daily spread broadcast by the journals; those who do not wish to see impiety enthroned in Spain, the Catholic land, above all others, granted by God one single faith and one single worship."

The brigadier grew redder than a guindilla pepper; his lips trembled with wrath; he was about to make some shocking remark, but at last he controlled himself, and said to the prosecuting officer, —

"Continue your examination, Señor Capitán."

For the first time in his life the brigadier smothered his barbarous words. The fiscal, over whom the force of attraction for the opposite sex had not yet lost its influence, perhaps from the reason that he was younger, continued, all the time softening his voice and sweetening the smile that distorted his countenance: —

"Very well; since you have the candor to confess that you have been a party to the conspiracy, let us hope that

you will continue to be as frank, and tell us all its details and the names of the persons connected with it."

"Oh, no, . . . that cannot be. I declare and confess my acts, but I cannot those of the others. Even if they granted me permission, be very sure that I would not do it, since it seems to me a sin to put into the hands of the impious arms to murder good Christians . . ."

"This cannot be allowed," vociferated the brigadier, overcome by wrath. "Let us see, señorita; do you believe that I have not the means to make you tell the whole story?¹ Let us have the session in peace, and do you tell mighty quick what you know, for otherwise there'll be trouble [*mal*]; . . . there'll be trrrouble [*maaal*]; . . . there'll be trrrrrouble [*maaaaaal*] . . ."

"Señor Presidente, I am not willing to say a single word that might compromise my friends, the pious and loyal defenders of the faith of Jesus Christ. Do with me whatsoever you will, but you must know that I shall accept with delight any chance to suffer something for Him who suffered so much for us."

"Heavens and earth!" [*¡Rayo de Dios!*] screamed the brigadier, giving another terrible pound to the table.

"This child has put an end to my patience! . . . Orderly, see that this girl is instantly conducted to prison, and keep her in solitary confinement until further orders." The officials of the council, understanding that this would make a scandal without any result, put it before the governor in a whisper, and he became a little calmer. He himself understood it.

"You are right," he said aloud; "all the information that this girl can give is already known to us, and more too. I don't wish these scrubby Carlist newspapers to be

¹ *cantar de plano.*

saying that we lost our temper with a wretched Harkee, orderly! see if this young woman is anywhere about, and have him brought in."

In a few moments Don Mariano entered.

"I find myself obliged to tell you, Señor colonel," said the brigadier, addressing him, "that you have an ill-educated daughter, and that thanks to the fact that you do not figure as a Carlist and to our own benevolence we do not adopt in her case the rigorous measures which she deserves for her boldness. You can take her home whenever you please, pledging yourself to us that she shall not directly or indirectly enter into any conspiracy or into anything of the like . . . Do we agree? . . . Have a little more care of her if you don't want to expose her to greater tribulations, and don't let her go so free and easy as hitherto . . ."

Don Mariano almost spoiled everything by hurling an insult in that rough soldier's face; but the sorrows which he had been undergoing since the night before kept him very humble. Besides, he feared to compromise his daughter's situation, and seeing her free he had no wish to lose her again. Reserving, then, *in pectore* for more favorable times, the right of demanding of the governor full satisfaction for his impudent words, he gave the promise demanded, and immediately passed from the hall and from the building with Maria, and went to call upon one of his relatives. In the afternoon they set out for Nieva, reaching home just at nightfall.

CHAPTER XIV.

PALLIDA MORS.

WHEN the carriage stopped, Don Mariano perceived by the face of the servant who came to open the door that nothing very delightful had occurred during his absence.

“The señora?” he asked in alarm.

“The señora is in bed.”

“Oh, I might have known it! How could the poor soul have had strength to resist this blow!”

The faces of the other servants whom they met on the way had the same expression of silent solemnity, and this greatly increased his agitation. Maria followed him. When they reached Doña Gertrudis’s room, they saw that there were a number of people in it who, on catching sight of them, came toward them with a warning gesture.

“What! Is she so ill?” exclaimed the unhappy Don Mariano, in a hoarse, trembling voice.

“She is not very ill,” said an officious lady: “but it is better that you should not enter so suddenly, for a powerful excitement might be bad for her. She has had a number of attacks since last night, and finds herself rather weak . . . Let me prepare her.”

The lady, in fact, went to tell Doña Gertrudis that her daughter was at liberty, and would soon be back to Nieva.

“My daughter is here!” cried the invalid, with that wonderful instinct of mothers and hysterical women . . . Yes, she is here! . . . I know she is! . . . I see her . . . Come, my daughter, come!”

And at the same time she made a desperate effort to sit up in bed. Maria entered her bedchamber, and kneeling beside the bed respectfully kissed the hands which her mother extended to her.

"Forgive me, mamma! forgive me for the anxiety which I caused you . . . You were made ill because of me, but the Lord will soon make you well . . ."

"No, my daughter; you have done nothing that needs my forgiveness; you have done what God commanded . . . It made me ill . . . that is true . . . but it is because I have not virtue enough, as you have, to suffer the trials God imposes upon us . . . You are a saint . . . I shall be well . . . Don't worry about me . . . What frightens me now is, that I did not die when I saw you marching off that way, among soldiers . . . My poor daughter . . . Come, give me a kiss!"

When Maria entered the bedroom, Ricardo and Marta were there; the girl seated near the pillow, and Ricardo at the foot of the bed. The young marquis, on learning at the factory that Maria was arrested, had asked the colonel to be relieved that night of guard duty, and his request being granted, he hastened to the Elorza mansion just as Don Mariano and his daughter were outside of the town. Doña Gertrudis was in the midst of a very severe fit, from which it was feared that she would not recover; she came to herself but only to fall immediately into another. What an anxious night! Don Maximo and the Señora de Ciudad remained with poor little Marta to watch by the sick woman. Ricardo likewise was unwilling to leave the house. The girl, appreciating that her mother's health and life depended on her behavior, kept up her courage, and did not cease to busy herself about the bed, entering and leaving the room

hundreds of times. As soon as Don Maximo gave an order she fulfilled it with admirable exactness. A multitude of remedies requiring much skill and some practice were taken: mustard poultices, leeches, assafetida washes, various applications to the temples, etc., etc. Marta would not consent for any servant to touch her mother; she did everything herself without bustle, without noise, as though all her life she had done nothing else. During the intervals of rest she sat by the bedside and watched the invalid's face with anxious eyes. The bedroom was feebly lighted by a lamp half turned down in the hall; a strong smell of drugs and medicines arose from the vials accumulated on the dressing-table; but Marta was not nauseated by any of the odors; her head was steady and her never-failing health was the envy of all the household. Ricardo likewise sometimes sat at the invalid's feet. The girl scarcely saw more than his silhouette outlined against the brighter opening of the door, but this was a great comfort to her. She was not alone; Ricardo was not a stranger. Sometimes when the invalid asked for something and both arose in haste to give it to her, if their hands met, Marta withdrew hers hurriedly, as though she had touched a viper, and she let her friend minister to Doña Gertrudis. Neither spoke. Marta, forgetful of herself, thought only of her mother. Ricardo, more egotistical, thought of Maria. The girl's whole soul was wrapped up in the dear being painfully breathing by her side, and without making the slightest error, with the accuracy of a chronometer, she counted her pulse and watched her respiration. Don Maximo and the Señora de Ciudad were whispering in the adjoining room, as though they were making confession. The lady was explaining to the old doctor the character and temperament of each

one of her daughters; the conversation was long. In the course of nine hours the sick woman had four severe attacks, leaving her so prostrated that the doctor seriously feared a fatal result. Nevertheless, after the fourth, she remained comparatively comfortable, and passed the day quite easily. The danger, in spite of this, continued.

After the first moments of effusion were over, Maria called her sister aside into a corner of the room.

"Tell me; has mamma made confession?"

"No."

"And why didn't you call the priest? . . . Didn't you perceive that she was in danger?"

The truth was, Marta had scarcely thought of doing such a thing. Besides, she was afraid of frightening her mother, and thought that this might be bad for her. In the bottom of her heart, likewise, there was a great terror of that tremendous scene, and she wanted to banish it from her mind. Maria chided her severely for her negligence, bringing before her the terrible responsibility which she would have incurred had her mother died. Marta saw that she was right, and hung her head. She sent instantly to summon Doña Gertrudis's confessor, and Maria undertook to prepare her mother. Wonder of wonders! Doña Gertrudis, who during her life had asked an infinite number of times to have her confessor summoned, now felt overwhelmed with surprise and fear when her daughter told her that she must get ready. Possibly the fact was, that when she had asked for it, she harbored the conviction that there was no real danger of death, while now she understood that matters were really serious. At all events, her daughter's words made a great impression upon her, and she raised all the objection in her power against receiving him, urging as an excuse that

she felt better; that when there should be danger, she would herself call for him.

Maria opposed this delay, and found herself under the cruel necessity of clearly explaining to the invalid the seriousness of her situation. Doña Gertrudis yielded, but her face betrayed a great discouragement.

When the priest arrived he was left alone with her, all retiring from the apartment. Marta went to weep alone in her room, so as not to sadden her father; he did the same, so as not to frighten his daughters. Maria watched at the door for the signal that the pious act was accomplished. At last the priest left the room, and, with the mask of solemnity which all daily witnesses of death-scenes are obliged to assume, hiding the real indifference, logically caused by such familiarity, he said to those who were waiting:—

“You can enter: we have finished.”

“How is she?” was the question of each one.

“Well! . . . well! . . . well! . . . The poor woman is calm . . .” I believe that for her to receive the Divine Majesty will be good for her, as well for the body as for the soul.”

“That is true . . . You are right, Señor Cura,” said several ladies.

“I have seen in my own family a very notable case of the power of faith,” declared one of them. “My uncle Pepe had a very serious lung trouble, confirmed consumption. He had consulted a multitude of physicians, and had taken more than a cartload of medicine. Well, then it was suggested that, unless he were prepared to die, he would not recover. He had the priest called, made confession, received the viaticum, and even wanted to have extreme unction . . . But from that very time, I don’t

know what it was, but it is a fact that he became more comfortable, and began to improve . . . to improve . . . to improve, until at last he became what you see him to-day."

The other women confirmed this opinion. Each one related her experience in support of it, and the priest summed up all the arguments, showing that such miraculous effects were nothing more than was to be expected, granting that the sick person's body received the presence of the Lord of the Heaven and earth, in whose hands is the safety of all mankind.

At eleven o'clock in the evening, they brought the viaticum to Doña Gertrudis with all the ceremony required by such a solemn act. The house of Elorza was filled with strange faces; a throng composed for the most part of working people invaded the stairway, the corridors, and even the invalid's sick-room, with wax tapers in their hands. The priest, with the acolyte before him, and the holy box on his breast, passed by the physician, and entered the sick-room. Don Mariano had gone to hide himself. Maria, with a book of devotions in her hand, read to her mother the prayers which were to be said before communion. Marta stood leaning against the wall, pale and frightened, gazing at the solemn ceremony, as though she saw some terrible vision. One of the women, who made their way into the room, handed her a lighted candle, and she took it without knowing what she did. When the priest brought forth the Holy Wafer, they had to tell her to kneel. The scene was sad and stirring for any one: how much more for a daughter! The wax candles lugubriously sputtered in the silence of the sick-room, and cast tremulous yellow reflections on the walls. The voice of the priest, as he raised the Host, was still more lugubrious than the sputtering of the tapers. The

invalid, weakened by her illness, had grown terribly pale from emotion; she sat up as well as she could and, supported by Maria, and with her hands folded over her breast, she opened her mouth to receive the body of Jesus Christ. Then the bystanders went out softly, and on the staircase was heard the vibrating tinkle of the sacristan's little bell, announcing that the Lord was departing from the house. Only the intimate friends remained. A group of ladies invaded the sick woman's room to congratulate her, and to ask after her health. Doña Gertrudis said that she was more comfortable; and, taking her daughter Maria's hand, she thanked her for having given her the pleasure of communion. Her recovery was to be hoped for; all the ladies found her very much like herself, and assured her that it would not be long before she was well.

"God can do all things, Doña Gertrudis. When one's accounts are settled with the Lord, there is no fear of any harm befalling. Nothing, this is nothing, señora; you will see how you will soon recover."

"I have offered a mass to the Sacred Christ of Tunis for the day on which our señora shall get well," said Genoveva, Maria's maid.

"Woman, why did you not offer it to the Ecce Homo of Mercy?" asked an old laundress of the house, in some surprise. She had always lighted the lamp before the said Ecce Homo, and kept the chapel clean, so that she came to look upon it as her own property.

"Ay, woman! because the Holy Christ of Tunis is more miraculous."

"A cuckold on *him*," exclaimed the washerwoman quickly, with angry eyes.

A furious altercation arose between the two, until Maria was scandalized, and bade them be still, explaining that the

Christ of Tunis and of Grace was one and the same Lord, though every Christian was free to have the most faith in whatever image he pleased.

At last the ladies withdrew, leaving only two, — the widow De Delgado and one of her sisters, — to spend the night with the young ladies. Don Maximo went to rest awhile, promising to return before long. The confessor did not wish to leave the house because he saw no improvement in his penitent, and he threw himself down on the sofa. Ricardo likewise remained.

At two o'clock what Don Maximo feared took place. The attack was renewed, and unfortunately with such violence that the unhappy lady very narrowly escaped passing away in it. Marta, on seeing the danger, recovered the activity which she lost before the lugubrious ceremony of the communion; she prepared all the medicines; she rubbed the sick woman's feet with a flesh-brush; she held her upright a long time, so that she might not choke to death, and acted as Don Maximo had prescribed in the former cases. All those who touched Doña Gertrudis hurt her; only Martita's soft hands had the privilege of moving her from side to side, and placing her in the most comfortable positions without causing her pain. Finally the sick woman came to herself and spoke, but Don Maximo, hastily summoned by the servants, found her pulse so feeble on his arrival that he could not help making a slight gesture of alarm. Marta noticed that gesture, and calling him alone into the passage-way, she threw her arms around his neck, sobbing: "Don Maximo, my dearest, for God's sake, save my mother! . . . yes, my mother is dying! . . . yes . . . she is dying . . . I saw your gesture . . ."

"Don't cry, child,"¹ said the old physician, drawing her

¹ *chiquita*.

head to his breast; "as yet there is no reason for alarm . . . I will certainly do all in my power, and more, to save her."

"Yes, yes, Don Maximo . . . Do it, I beseech you by all that you most love in this world! . . . by the memory of your wife, whom you loved so dearly!"

"Don't! try not to cry any more! the thing to do now is to go and give her a spoonful of quinine; then we will put a cataplasm on her stomach."

The good Don Maximo, disguising the presentiment which he felt, succeeded in calming the girl, and he set himself to applying the remedies which his poor science but rich desire suggested.

But he was not able to halt the swift approach of death which in full career was fast approaching the noble lady's couch. At four o'clock in the morning they noticed that she spoke with greater difficulty; her pronunciation halted, and she often stammered. Almost all her words were directed to Maria, asking her numberless times about the events of the preceding night, and insisting on being told, showering boundless praise on her for her bravery, and congratulating herself on having such a good daughter.

"My daughter, beseech God for my safety . . . God cannot . . . deny thee anything."

"Maria, perceiving that her mother was dying, replied:

"Mamma, the one important thing is the safety of the soul . . . If God wishes to restore you, let it be a miracle to you of his sacred grace . . ."

"But . . . am I dying . . . my daughter?"

"God only can tell . . . Do you wish the señor cura to come in and give you a short confession?"

"Yes . . . let him come in . . . my daughter, let him come in!"

The priest came, and remained a few moments alone with the sick woman. Those who were in the adjoining room kept a sad silence. Don Mariano lying on a sofa, with his cheek resting in one hand, shut his eyes and gave evidence of deep dejection. After the priest had finished, Marta, Maria, Ricardo, and Don Maximo returned. Doña Gertrudis's condition grew continually more critical. There began to be noticeable in her a restlessness of bad augury; she turned her head from one side to the other as though she could not find a resting-place, as though she were already searching for the pillow on which she was to repose eternally. Her vacillating hands picked up and dropped the bedclothes incessantly, while her eyes also restlessly rolled in their orbits, fastening, from time to time, on the ceiling of the room; it seemed as though she found no one on whom to rest them. Soon Martita noticed that her hands were cold, and she mentioned the fact aloud, in a simple manner, without appreciating its unfortunate significance. Don Maximo turned away his head to hide his emotion; the priest let his fall on his breast.

"I feel . . . very well . . . now," she said to Maria, raising her daughter's hand to her lips. "As soon as I . . . I am well . . . we will go . . . to Lourdes . . . together . . . will we not? . . . It is very . . . pretty . . . is it that one? . . . very pretty . . . very pretty . . . If you knew . . . what I see now! . . . The Virgin . . . the Virgin coming . . . surrounded by stars . . . Put on my . . . velvet dress . . . to receive her . . . Come . . . quick . . . quick . . . Don't you see . . . I am entering by the door? . . . Ay! what trials! . . . Good day, Señora . . . I have a daughter . . . who much resembles you . . . She has a fair complexion . . . and blue eyes . . . very beautiful! . . . very beautiful!"

A slight hoarseness began to choke the sick woman's throat; the last words were rather breathed than spoken; it was a dry, sharp huskiness constantly growing more pronounced. The confessor hearing it made a sign to Maria, and she quickly took a silver image of Christ hanging on the wall, and put it in her mother's hand, saying:—

"Mamma, think on the Lord . . . Think of what the Divine Saviour suffered for us."

"I . . . am not . . . dying," said the invalid.

"Yes, mamma . . . yes . . . you are dying," replied the young woman with kindled face, full of fear and anguish, fearing that she was not well prepared. "Repent of the sins that you have committed! . . . You do repent, and ask forgiveness of God for them, don't you?"

"Yes . . . yes," murmured the invalid.

"Repeat the creed with me!" said the confessor, assuming a more solemn tone: "I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . maker of heaven . . . and earth . . ."

Doña Gertrudis repeated the priest's words clumsily, and as though she were not heeding what she did. She looked at the ceiling with strange persistence, while the features of her countenance were rapidly changing; a purple circle was drawn around her eyes, and her nostrils became strangely pinched. When the priest was done she again began to address Maria.

"The truth . . . is . . . that I have . . . no hat . . . fit to make the journey . . . to Lourdes in . . . Those that I . . . have . . . are . . . very old-fashioned . . . Do me . . . the favor . . . to write to Luisa . . . and have her . . . send me one . . . in the newest style . . . You also . . . need a dress . . . Attend to it, my daughter . . . attend to it."

"Mamma, leave the vanities of the world . . . Think on God . . . Consider that you are going to appear very soon in his presence."

"No . . . no . . . I am not dying."

"Ay, mamma, by the Holy Virgin, I beg you to feel that you are going to die . . . Think on your salvation!"

"I am thinking about it . . . yes . . . I am thinking about it," said the invalid mechanically.

The priest began to read from a book the Commendation of the Soul in Latin. All knelt. Then the dying woman, raising her head a little, asked:—

"Why are you all kneeling?"

"To recommend you to God, mamma," replied Maria.

And getting up and putting her face near her mother's, she continued in a whisper:—

"Say with me, mamma: '*My Jesus . . .*'"

The mother repeated listlessly: "*My Jesus.*"

"*By thy most sacred passion.*"

"By thy most sacred . . . passion."

"*By the innumerable pains that thou hast suffered.*"

"By the in . . . numerable . . . pains."

"*That thou hast suffered,*" repeated Maria.

"That thou hast suffered."

"*Pardon thou my offences.*"

"Pardon thou . . . my offences."

"*And save my soul.*"

"That'll do, that'll do!" said the dying woman, pushing her daughter away with her trembling hand. "No, I am not dying . . . I am well . . . Come here, Martita . . . It isn't true . . . that I am . . . dying . . . is it, daughter?"

"No, mamma," replied the girl, pressing her hands. "You are not dying, mamita; no . . . You must get well soon, and we will go to drive in the carriage as we used . . . now the weather is fine."

"Yes, loveliest, yes . . . We will go . . . wait . . . lift me a little . . . I am uncomfortable in this position."

Marta helped her to sit up; but as she did so her mother's eyes rested upon her, fixed, motionless, terrible. That look smote the poor girl to the depths of her heart, and uttering a frightful, piercing cry, she let her fall back on the pillow. The Señora de Elorza's head relaxed as though the neck were dislocated, with open mouth and rigid lips; and still from the pillow her great glassy eyes continued to follow her daughter with the same fixed and terrifying gaze.

"Mother of my heart!" cried the girl, instantly throwing her arms around her. "Do not look at me so, for God's sake! Mamita mia, do not look at me so. Ay! do not look at me so. Ay! how you terrify me! . . . Mamita! mamita! . . . Ay! O God, what is it?"

Don Mariano, who, on hearing the cry, had hurried into the bedchamber with anxious face, and hair standing on end, tried to draw his daughter from the corpse.

"Come away! my soul's daughter, now you have no longer a mother!"

"Yes, I have her . . . Yes . . . here she is . . . **Mamma! Mamita!** You are here, are you not? . . . **Answer me! . . . Speak! . . . Kiss me, for God's sake, mamita! . . .** Let go of me, papa! . . . Let go of me! . . . Now she is going to kiss me; . . . Wait a moment, for God's sake! . . . Let go of me, papa darling! . . . Let her kiss me!"

The girl had embraced the dead body of her mother with extraordinary force, and covered it with eager loud kisses. Don Mariano, terribly excited, almost beside himself, pulled her away brutally, as though the welfare of all depended upon wrenching her from that position.

Maria, kneeling in one corner of the room, had lifted her eyes and her hands to heaven, and was praying for the eternal glory of the departed.

At last they succeeded in dragging Marta away, and took her to another room. Without intending it at all, they caused her great harm. The unhappy girl had not sufficiently mastered her grief; by taking her away they choked the fountain of her tears, and they did not flow again. Pale, completely altered, with eyes fixed on vacancy, she neither listened to what was said to her, nor was willing to take what was given to calm her. She did nothing else but repeat incessantly, in a low, somewhat hoarse voice:—

“Mamma . . . Mamma . . . Mamma!”

The priest went to her, and said:—

“My daughter, calm yourself, calm yourself. It is a test which God sends you that you may show your resignation. Instead of rebelling against His will, you ought to thank Him for His remembrance of you, showing that He loves you . . .”

“Don’t say foolish things!” exclaimed the girl, in an angry voice, casting upon him a look of scorn. “Is that a proof of God’s love, that he has taken away my mother? . . . Then that’s a fine kind of love! . . . a fine kind of love . . . a fine kind of love!”

Marta kept repeating the expression over and over again for some time, in a tone of irritation. When she had calmed down a little the priest said once more,—

“My daughter, you should take example of your sister. She feels her misfortune as much as you, but she is giving proof of Christian resignation and fortitude . . . She does not rebel: she acknowledges the working of the Almighty hand, and with her prayers is contributing to

the greater happiness and glory of her who is no more."

Marta saw that the priest was right; she repented of her anger and hung her head, murmuring, —

"Oh, my sister is a saint!"

"You also can be one, my daughter. The road to perfection is open to all who wish to follow it . . ."

The girl received the counsels of the priest and of the others who were with him, but did not answer a word. She continued in the same way, not moving a finger, her face pale and distorted, and her eyes fixed. Her indifference began to cause them anxiety, and they told her father. The instant Don Mariano entered the room, she felt a shock, and suddenly jumping up she threw herself into his arms sobbing bitterly. She was saved.

The friends of the family, by dint of strong pressure, made Don Mariano and Martita go and rest for a few minutes, while the proper arrangements were made for laying out the body and for the funeral. Maria remained praying in her mother's room. The pale rays of the dawn found her still on her knees, with her face turned to heaven. The wax tapers which she herself had taken care to place around the deathbed were burning funereally, their crude yellow beams struggling with the languid light pouring into the room. No one dared to call her from her devout meditations; those who penetrated into the dressing-room and saw her in that attitude, whispered a few words of surprise, and retired silently with emotion and admiration.

Finally, all the outside people went away, and Maria shut herself in her room to take the rest which she so much needed, after the cruel series of changes and the great labors that she had undergone during the last few

hours. At noon the father and his two daughters met in the dining-room, to begin the melancholy meal which all who have experienced a family affliction will recall with horror: a meal in which tears mingle with the food, and sobs fill the long intervals of silence. At this first meal scarcely any one spoke; no one ventured to lift his eyes lest they should meet those of the others, and only furtive, grief-stricken glances were cast at the place left vacant by the being who had just fled from this world forever. The courses were eaten mechanically, without appetite, and handkerchiefs were lifted to the eyes oftener than napkins to the lips; the rattle of the dishes cruelly wounded their ears, and the rare words exchanged fell from their lips tremulously and without animation. The spirit protested dumbly against the brutal necessity imposed upon it by the body, obliging it, by such a wretched act, to give over the expression of its bitter grief and break the current of its melancholy thoughts.

They arose from the table in the same silence. Maria shut herself in her room again. Don Mariano, accompanied by Martita, likewise went to his. They sat down together on a sofa, with their arms closely clasped about each other for the larger part of the afternoon; the caresses which they bestowed upon each other gradually changed their desperate sorrow into a most tender feeling, melting into tears. They took turns in consoling each other; the girl declared that her mother in heaven would be on the watch for them all, and promised to be always good and prudent, and never to cause her father sorrow; the father pressed her to his heart, and blessed her mother for having given him such good and beautiful daughters. When a servant came to tell them of the call of some ladies, they felt an unspeakable annoyance, a painful

impression, as though they had been wakened from some melancholy sweet sorrow to plunge into despair again.

Don Mariano suspected the motive of the call. They wanted to distract their attention, so that they might not notice the noise made by the men in carrying the body from the house. And, in fact, a group of ladies and a few gentlemen endeavored, by repeated entreaties, to persuade them to go to more retired apartments; but their efforts, as far as Don Mariano was concerned, were in vain; he strenuously urged his friends, in a tone which gave no chance for reply, to leave him alone as they had done, but to take Martita with them.

Alone with his grief the Señor de Elorza felt more keenly his loss and more deeply his misfortune. In youth there is scarcely any loss that is not reparable; the passions, the feelings are more intense, but at the same time more transitory. One lives for the future, and through the darkest and most furious storms there never fails to shine some bright spot, promising consolation. But at the age which our caballero had reached hope is no more; the future exists not. Every misfortune undergone is a new pain, coming to join those that are past, and waiting for those that are to come: the affections which perish, like the hair that falls, find no substitute. Don Mariano, with eyes closed and head sadly bent upon his breast, let his thoughts fly back over all the events of his long life, and in all of them, whether fortunate or unlucky, he saw the image of his wife, the inseparable companion of his manhood. He saw her awakening in his youthful heart a passion at once tender and ardent: beautiful and pure as an angel, with delicate oval face and blue eyes, looking at him with love. He remembered perfectly the few times when he had had lover's quarrels with her, and

the little reason that there had been for almost all of them. Gertrudis had such a peaceable disposition and such a gentle nature. It always ended in making her weep. He saw her on the day of his marriage, in her black satin (she was still in mourning for her father, the Marqués de Revollar) with which the fairness of her complexion and the gold of her hair made a dazzling contrast. A distinguished gentleman of Madrid, present at the wedding, taking him into a corner of the drawing-room, said to him: "Elorza, you are marrying one of the most beautiful women of Spain. I tell you so, and I have seen many in my life." The same day he started on a journey through foreign lands. He remembered, as though it were but yesterday, the intoxicating, ineffable impression, perhaps the sweetest and most blissful of his life, that he felt when he suddenly found himself alone with his beloved, as the coachman whipped up his horses, and they heard the farewells of the relations and friends, who sped them from the door of the palace of Revollar. How the poor little girl blushed when she realized that they were alone, and she in her lover's power! But he was polite and generous. He merely asked for one hand, and raised it timidly to his lips. All the enchanting details of that journey were imprinted on the Señor de Elorza's memory. Then he remembered the strange sensation of pleasure and surprise which he felt at the birth of his first child, and the deliciously cruel impression which his wife made upon him, by keeping him rigorously away from her during those moments of anguish. But, *ay!* in a short time poor Gertrudis became an invalid, and never recovered perfect health. In spite of this, his love for her had never grown cool; he took the greatest care of her, endeavoring, by all the means in his power, to alleviate her sufferings.

She appreciated his sacrifices, seeing in him a Providence who always soothed her by his caresses. Even after many years had gone by, and when no one at all took any notice of the good lady's tribulations, still Don Mariano was the one who pitied her most, though he made believe look upon her attacks with disdain, and she comprehended it perfectly, and she still reserved for him in her heart the same privileged place as in her youth. The harmony of generous, warm sentiments in both, the affection which they had lavished upon their daughters, the deep esteem which they mutually felt, and the ever vivid recollection of their passionate loves, had been so woven into life that neither of them understood it without being side by side. It was the intimate, perfect, and absolute union ordained by God, such as men rarely heed.

A melancholy, ominous noise, heard through the walls of his room, caused him to raise his head, and fix his eyes on space. Yes, there could be no doubt; they were carrying her away, carrying her away. Don Mariano flung himself, face down, on the sofa, and hid his face in the cushions to choke his sobs.

"My wife! wife of my heart! . . . They are carrying you away . . . carrying you away forever! . . . Ay! how terrible!"

And the good caballero's tears soaked through the texture of the damask, and his athletic form shook convulsively because of his sobs. Then he felt a great curiosity, that terrible curiosity which exerts a fascination at such moments, and leaves an indelible mark on the memory of him who has satisfied it. He waited attentively and soon heard the heavy shuffling of feet, and after a little the funereal, heart-rending song of the clergy almost under the balconies. Then he got up quickly, and cau-

tiously lifted one of the curtains. And he saw the coffin, the black, gilded coffin, borne like a boat above the throng. The sky was cloudy and gray, leaving the great plaza of Nieva in shadow. The surging multitude extended to the farthest corners, moving with a slow and measured tread. And the boat, preceded by a great silver cross between two lighted candles, was borne away, carrying from him for evermore his treasure.

He let the curtain drop and once more flung himself on the sofa, muttering incoherent words. He knew not how long he remained thus. The light was fading, leaving the room in shadow, and everything was silent . . . Everything except his thoughts, which spoke to him ceaselessly, and the sobs which broke from his breast.

And thus he remained a long time, a long time. At last he perceived that the door of his room was softly opening; he turned his head and saw his daughter Maria. She came and sat silently beside him. But he, as though having a presentiment of a new sorrow, asked her no question, said nothing. He merely took her hand and closed his eyes again.

"Papa," said the young woman after a long period of silence, "we have suffered a fearful misfortune, one of those misfortunes which cause even the most sceptical to turn their eyes to heaven in search of consolation. God alone possesses the key to them; He knows their reason, and is able to turn them into a result advantageous for us. This misfortune has confirmed me in a resolution which I made some time since, to consecrate myself to God forever . . . I know by a thousand signs that He calls me, and I should be truly ungrateful if I did not obey His call . . . I am useless in the world . . . All its amusements weary me; thus, then, I make no sacrifice in

confining myself in a convent . . . Besides, there I can better pray for you and be more useful to you than here . . . The idea of matrimony, which you have desired for me, is repugnant to my heart, where fortunately there has sprung up another and purer love which is immortal . . . This resolution ought not to surprise you . . . I believe that you ought not to feel it . . . At this solemn moment in which afflictions weigh down upon you, perhaps it may be a consolation to you to know that you are going to have a daughter safeguarded from all deceit, from all disloyalty, who is living happily in the service of God and praying for you."

Maria had spoken with frequent pauses, as though she expected her father to interrupt her. But she ended, and still there passed a long period of silence without his opening his lips. At last the young woman asked him, timidly, —

"Have you nothing to say to me, papa?"

"Nothing," he replied, without looking at her.

"But do you give me your consent to do as I said?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I knew you would! . . . You are so good . . . and sufficiently religious . . . You are not like other fathers who are blinded, and would rather their daughters were exposed to the dangers of the world than be forever servants of the Lord, in the safe precincts of a holy house . . . Thanks, papa, thanks . . . I was afraid . . . it is true, I was afraid that you would not approve my resolution . . . But God has touched your heart . . . Now I will leave you . . . Marta is waiting for me . . . Adios, papa! . . . Let me kiss you . . . Adios!"

And the door opened and shut again softly. The Señor de Elorza remained motionless in the same position

in which his daughter left him, sitting with his hands clasped and his head bent on his breast.

The room remained in darkness. The noises outside slowly died away. An immense, keen, cruel grief palpitated in that lonely room, and a pair of fixed, stupefied, tearless eyes reflected the few rays of light that still wandered lost in the atmosphere.

How long did he remain so?

Perhaps the little birds that came at dawn to perch on the bars of the balconies might reply. But the pallor of his cheeks, the livid circles around his eyes, and the deep wrinkles in his brow, doubtless more exactly told.

CHAPTER XV.

LET US REJOICE, BELOVED.

IN the small but pretty church of the nuns of San Bernardo, in Nieva, there was great bustling. The sacristan, aided by three acolytes, the two serving women of the convent, and a female from the city, celebrated for her skill in dressing the saints, were stirring up a more than ordinary noise in brushing the ornaments of the altars with fox tails and feather dusters. They had no hesitation in standing upon them, and even climbing upon the saints themselves, whenever it was required by the need of dusting some carved work or placing a taper in the proper place. The Mother Abbess from the choir, with her forehead pressed against the grating, shouted her orders like a general-in-chief, in a sharp, piping voice.

“A candlestick there! Yonder a wreath of flowers! Lift up that lamp a little more! Place the crown on that Virgin straight . . .”

In the interior of the convent likewise reigned considerable excitement. A group of nuns was watching at the door of a cell, as one of their companions was giving the last touches to the poor bed which she was making. She had just put up above the pillow the crucifix demanded by the rules. A great silver waiter stood on the table, which was pine, likewise according to the rules. When the nun had made the bed ready, she came out of the cell, addressing a word or two to the others as she passed. Then she returned with a bundle of clothes in her hand, and all

hastened to relieve her of them, unfolding them, pulling them, and giving them a hundred turns. It was the complete dress of a novice, — the white flannel tunic, the linen hood, the shoes, the rosary, the bronze crucifix, and other things. The nuns looked eagerly at each one of the articles, as though it were something that they had never seen before, uttering in low voices many different opinions.

“Ay! it seems to me that this rosary has very coarse beads.” — “No, sister, take yours and you will see that they are alike.” — “I am going to see, just for my own satisfaction . . . It’s true; they are alike . . . What a goose!” — “The flannel is too harsh.” — “It is because it wasn’t well washed.” — “This hood is beautifully ironed!” — “Hesús mio! what stitches! . . . that is not sewing, it is basting! . . . Who made this tunic?” — “The Sister Isabel.” — “Then it’s splendid!” — “Don’t say so, sister, perhaps you wouldn’t have done it so well!” — “I? do it worse? . . . Come . . . come . . . never in my life did I make such a botch!” — “How many have you ever done, sister?” — “Never did I, never!” repeated the nun, in angry voice. “I could sew better when I was seven years old.”

At this moment the Mother Superior appeared in the passage-way; the nun who had chided her companion stepped aside from the group, and said to her, —

“Mother, Sister Luísa has just boasted that she sews better than Sister Isabel, and she lost her temper because I told her that she ought not to do it.”

“Is it true, daughter?” demanded the Mother Superior, in a severe tone.

Sister Luísa hung her head.

The Mother Superior meditated a moment or two; then she said: —

"Daughter, you know well that here no one ought to boast of doing anything better than any one else . . . You ought to believe yourself the least of all, for perhaps you are . . . For some time you have been very far from humble, and it is necessary for us to begin to correct this fault . . . First thing, go and ask pardon of Sister Isabel for your fault, and then shut yourself in your cell and pray a rosary to the Virgin . . . Afterwards when I am in the reception-room with the novice, you must present yourself there and kneel, so that the people may see that you are in disgrace."

Sister Luisa bent her head still lower and hurried away. A smile of triumph hovered over the lips of the nun.

At the same time, the servants of the Elorza mansion were coming and going, hither and thither, with various objects in their hands. Pedro, the old coachman, was polishing the state carriage, while two stable-boys were grooming the horses. Martin, the cook, was preparing a splendid collation. The maid-servants were running up and down stairs, from the principal floor to Maria's apartments, which were full of people, though it was not yet ten o'clock in the morning. The fifteen or twenty ladies who could scarcely find room to turn around, were all talking at once, as is natural, turning that silent elegant retreat into an insufferable hen-roost. Standing in the middle of it was Señor de Elorza's eldest daughter, half-dressed, and around her were several ladies, some of them on their knees, adorning her and adjusting her as though she were a wooden virgin. Great emotion reigned everywhere. They had already put on her a costly garment of white

satin, decorated in front, from the neck to the bottom of the skirt, with a fringe of orange flowers. One lady was just putting on her feet a pair of diminutive and most elegant boots of the same cloth, while another was hurriedly sewing on a number of flowers, which had fallen off. Others were arranging a garland of orange blossoms upon the top of her head; this proceeding caused a great commotion. Amparito Ciudad claimed that the garland was too large, and did not show enough of her friend's beautiful hair; the rest believed that there was no need of making it smaller. After a lively discussion, it was decided to adopt a middle course by taking a number of flowers, though very few, from the wreath. Frequent exclamations were heard from those who took no share in the preparations.

"Ay! what an expense it takes, Dios mio!"

"Can it be her true vocation! . . . A girl so young and so lively!"

"There is nothing else talked about in town . . . Everybody is excited over this fortunate event!"

"Fortunate for her, my dear! I don't know as I shall have strength enough to see the ceremony."

"But I am going to see it, though it should cost me a fit of sickness."

Some were already beginning to shed tears, putting their handkerchiefs to their eyes; others were whispering about the preparations for the festival, and the circumstances which had led the young woman to take the veil. Much was said about a letter which she had written to the Marqués de Peñalta, bidding him farewell, and exculpating herself. Some pitied Ricardo, while others said in a undertone, that he would have no trouble in finding some body to marry him. "After all, if God called her to Him

by this path, had she any reason to turn from Him, because a young lad was in love with her? If she had left him for another, that would be different! but as it was for God, he had no right to complain." This was the same argument that shone in the *Señorita de Elorza's* letter, written and sent to Ricardo a fortnight before the day of which we are speaking. Thus it ran: —

"MY DEAR RICARDO, —

"Though it is now some time since the course of our love was interrupted, tacitly, and by virtue of providential circumstances, rather than by my desire, I feel it my duty to explain to thee something about the resolution which I have made, and which, of course, is known to thee. I cannot forget, and indeed I ought not to forget, that thou hast been my betrothed, with the approbation of my parents, and the sincere affection of my heart.

"Before renouncing the world forever, I must tell thee that I have absolutely no reason to complain of thy behavior to me. Thou hast ever been good, true, and affectionate, and hast estimated me higher than I deserve. It is indeed true, that if I were to remain in the world I would not give thee in exchange for any other man, and I should count myself very happy in calling thee my husband, if I did not count myself much more so in being the bride of Jesus Christ. The preference which I make cannot offend or trouble a man who is as good and pious as thou art. Henceforth no earthly love exists between us; there remains only a pure and most sweet friendship, uniting us in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I shall not forget thee in my poor prayers. Forget me, as far as possible. Thou art good, thou art noble, handsome, and rich. Seek for a woman who will deserve thee more than I deserve thee, and marry, and be happy. I shall pray without ceasing for you.

"Adios,

"MARIA."

Could he have had a better gilded pill? No; no; Ricardo had no right to complain.

While the most of the ladies added innumerable glosses to this document, those who were robing the new bride-elect of Jesus were about finishing their task and giving the last touches to her dress, with the same complacency that an artist shows in laying the last shades on his picture, stepping back and coming near a thousand times to realize the effect produced. Here a pin; the throat a little more open to show the beautiful alabaster neck; a few ringlets on her brow carelessly escaping from among the orange flowers; a button that needed fastening. Maria aided her maids of honor with quick motions. All admired her serenity. And, in fact, the young bride could not have shown a face more joyous at such moments. Nevertheless there was a certain agitation noticeable in her joy. Her movements were too quick and eager, as though she were trying to hide the slight trembling of her hands and the tremor that ran over her whole body. Was it a tremor of delight?

Oh, yes, Maria felt an intense delight.

The brilliant rose bloom of her cheeks told the same story; the unnatural glitter of her eyes likewise proclaimed it. Her lips were dry, and her nostrils pink and more dilated than usual. Her white brow was marked by a long, slight furrow, telling of the quick desire, the restless, sensual eagerness hidden in her heart. It was the cheerful eagerness of the epicure, who finds himself face to face with his favorite food after a long fast. Over his excited brilliant face passed a throng of warm flushes, a vague, intricate confusion of dismay, dread, and voluptuous desires. She was going to be the bride of Jesus Christ and shut herself forever between four walls, pass

ing her whole life in a mysterious union, whose sweet delight she had not as yet enjoyed in full. A great curiosity overwhelmed her, stirred her unspeakably. The choir of the Convent of San Bernardo, where the half light pouring in through the lofty windows slept in mystic calm upon the gray oaken chairs, had always fascinated her. How many times she had trembled, when she saw a silent white figure cross the floor and sit down there in the body of the church. It was a sweet voluptuous trembling, which made her eagerly long to enter that fantastic retreat. The nuns, with their tall white figures, seemed to her like supernatural beings, — angels come down to earth for a while, who would soon mount up to heaven again. She was particularly attracted by one who was young and beautiful; when she saw her enter the choir, she could not take her eyes from her. The stern, classic beauty of that sister, and her clear, steady gaze made an impression upon her, which she could not explain. In her breast sprang up a certain extravagant attraction toward her, and a quick, eager desire to be her friend, or rather her disciple; to kneel before her and say: “Teach me, guide me.” Oh, if she would permit me to give her a kiss, even though it were the briefest! One evening a tremendous temptation assailed her to ask her for it. The church was empty; she looked back and saw that the beautiful nun had made her way into the choir and was kneeling near the grating. And, without further consideration as to what she was doing, she went to her and said in trembling voice: “Sefiora, give me your hand, that I may kiss it.” The nun made a graceful sign that it could not be, but rising, she offered her the crucifix of her rosary, with a smile so sweet and assuring, that Maria, when she kissed it, felt deeply moved.

Always when she entered the church of the convent she felt the same rapture, a species of voluptuous somnolence penetrating her whole being like a caress. From that choir came languorous, sweet murmurs, calling her, inviting her to leave the pleasures of the world for others more sweet and mysterious, which she had already begun to enjoy without full knowledge of them. Jesus had granted her already rich enjoyments in her prayers, but He would not abandon himself completely, — certainly would not lose consciousness of self in the arms of the bride; would not give His all to her with the infinite, immortal love which she eagerly desired, except within that silent poetic retreat where no sound could disturb them.

At last the day had come for her to satisfy her desire; within an hour she would be within that mysterious choir which had caused her so many dreams, and would cross with floating tunic the warm sunlight falling through the lofty windows. She felt impatient for the moment to arrive. She was nervous, restless, but smiling. Never had she been so self-satisfied. Her friends were not weary of exalting her virtue and heroism; the town regarded her with surprise, and around her she heard only praise and words of admiration. Maria really found herself upon a pedestal. And like every one who is under the public gaze, our heroine succeeded in hiding the emotions of her soul, and showed a serene and joyous face. It was her day; it was the day of the great battle, and she smoothed her brow and composed the expression of her face, like a general when the hour of the attack has come.

Nevertheless, from time to time she gazed with anxiety at one of the corners of her boudoir. In that corner sat her sister, with her face in her hands, sobbing. At last

not being able to control herself longer, she suddenly left her maids of honor and went to Marta, and bending down her face so that it touched her, she said : —

“Do not weep, dear, do not weep more ; . . . there is no misfortune here to make you so sorrowful. On the other hand, think of the great favor which God has shown in calling me to be his bride . . . You ought to rejoice, my little pigeon ;¹ come, don't weep any more, darling [*monina*] . . . Consider that you are taking away my strength.”

And as she said that, she kissed her pretty little sister's smooth rosy cheek. The girl replied amid her sobs, —

“Ay! Maria, I lose you forever !”

“No, *monina*, no . . . you will often see me . . . and you will speak with me . . .”

“What does that amount to? . . . I am going to lose you, my sister.”

And Marta could not help saying this “I lose you ; I lose you forever” — she could not because it was the only thought that filled her heart at that instant, her heart that never was untrue ; she was accustomed to speak freely her beliefs and opinions. Marta accepted without resistance the idea that her sister was doing well to enter the convent, but she was absolute mistress of her heart ; there no one held sway but herself, and her heart told her that she had no longer any sister, that all Maria's love, all her tenderness was about to evaporate like a divine essence in the depths of a mysterious, vague something, totally incomprehensible to her.

Just as Maria's toilet was almost completed, a young man came rushing into the room with the violence of a gust of wind. It was that youth with the banded hair,

¹ *pichona*.

who gradually had made himself indispensable in all festivals, solemnities, ceremonies, and merry-makings of the town.

“Mariña! the secretary of the señor bishop sends me to tell you that his eminence is ready, and is at this moment starting for the church.”

“Very well, I shall be right out.”

“I have attended to the organ-loft. I notified Don Scrapio and the organist . . . Preciosa, Mariña preciosa . . . Do notice the blue hangings which I put on the picture of the Virgin . . .”

“Thanks, Ernesto, many thanks; I am deeply grateful to you.”

At a sign from Maria all the ladies arose, and hastened behind her down the stairs, but for all that there was no cessation of their impertinent chatter. The young woman went straight to her father's room, and remained shut in it for some time. No one knew what passed within. Those who were waiting at the door heard the sound of sobs, confused sentences spoken in angry tones, the movement of chairs. The ladies, waiting in the ante-room, whispered to those who came in, “She is taking farewell, farewell of her father . . . Don Mariano will not attend the ceremony.”

Shortly afterward, Maria re-appeared, smiling and serene as before, saying, “Come, ladies, let us go!”

With the same serenity she passed through the great room of the mansion without giving a glance at the furniture, and descended the broad, stone stairway without showing the slightest trepidation, as she walked along in her dainty white satin shoes.

And yet what recollections she left behind her! How many hours of light and joy! The prattle of her children

ish lips, sweet as the trilling of a bird ; her father's somewhat gruff but, for that very reason, all the sweeter singing, as he rocked her to sleep in his arms ; the dreams, the fresh laughter of her girlhood ; the lovely sun of April mornings, filling her room with light ; the constant caresses of her mother, the warmth of home ; in short, that warmth which all the treasures of earth cannot buy ; all this remained behind her, imprinted on the walls, ingrained in the furniture. And she left it all without a tear !

At the door stood waiting a magnificent barouche, drawn by four white horses. Pedro had shown his taste by decorating them with great blue plumes, and by donning a livery of the same color. On that day everything must be blue, the color of purity and virginity. Even the sky, for greater glory, had clad itself in blue, and shone clear and beautiful. Maria climbed into the carriage with the Señora de Ciudad, her godmother, and the others took leave of her for the nonce, and hastened to the church.

Extraordinary agitation reigned in the town. The taking of the veil by the Señorita de Elorza, though expected for some time, nevertheless did not fail to make a profound impression. A young lady so rich, so beautiful, so flattered by all that the world considered gay and desirable ! Interminable comments were made during these days, as people met in the shops. " But didn't they say that she was to be married to the marquesito ? " — " No ! not at all ! there's no such thing. The marquesito was greatly disappointed ; the girl, after the strange experience of being arrested, and her mother's death, returned with more zest than ever to her pious occupations ; it is decidedly her vocation : there is no fickleness about her." Some looked upon it in one way, some in another ; but as a general

thing. Maria's conduct aroused lively sympathy, and over many, especially among the people, it exerted a certain fascination like everything extraordinary, and up to a certain point, marvellous. She had the reputation of being a saint: the quenching of all the splendor of her beauty, wealth, and talent in the solitudes of the cloister, was the unparalleled complement of her fame, the crowning stroke in the process of her popular canonization. All those rough women, who pitilessly elbowed each other in order to see her pass toward the church, would have felt themselves defrauded, if she had wedded prosaically, and had they seen her arm in arm with her husband, preceded by a nurse-maid with a tender infant in arms.

The plaza was full of spectators. When the young lady entered the carriage, and Pedro, cracking his tongue and his whip, started up his horses, there was a great tumult among the throng, which reached Maria's ears like a chorus of flatteries. The people separated precipitately, making way for her to pass. In presence of that magnificence, which only some old woman had ever seen before, the peaceful inhabitants found themselves overwhelmed with respect, and equally excited by a great curiosity. The carriage rolled away, at first slowly, breaking the close ranks of the spectators; the horses pranced impatiently, shaking their blue plumes as though they were anxious to carry the bride to the arms of the mystic Bridegroom. It was a royal procession; and, in truth, Maria from her elegant appearance, splendidly adorned, with her deep blue eyes, shining with emotion, and her cheeks of milk and roses, was worthy of being a queen. She was a figure of remarkable beauty, and offered many points of resemblance to the fair Virgin of Murillo, that we see in the Museum at Madrid. The women of the town could

not restrain their enthusiasm, and they burst out in a thousand flattering adjectives.

"Look at her! look at her! What a splendid creature, — a woman after my very heart!"

"I should like to devour her with kisses!"

"And what a rich dress she wears!"

"They say that it came expressly from Paris. She did not want to dress in *tisú*; the chasubles which it will make into will be given away separately, and the gown will remain for the Virgin of Amor Hermoso."

"Oh, I never saw such a lovely creature! . . . She looks like an angel."

The carriage followed its majestic course, and the young woman smiled sweetly on the multitude. From two or three houses a deluge of flowers was showered upon her, and their variegated petals for a moment enameled the white cloth of her dress; a few remained entangled in her hair. The people applauded.

"Woman, this girl's vocation teaches us a lesson."

"How fortunate she is! . . . Who would be in her place?"

"It can't be said that she was obliged to . . . I know that her father was furious when he heard about it, and tried every way to dissuade her."

"Come now, she is wedded to Jesus Christ, and her family don't like it," declared a youth, who was listening to this conversation.

The women turned around ready to crush the scoffer, but he made off, laughing.

And the carriage continued on its way under the radiant sun, which made the panes of the balconied windows glitter, and reflected on the white houses of the town with transports of delight. The sky opened up its purest

depths, smiling upon all the wishes for happiness, all the joyful aspirations of mortals, even upon those of the beautiful maiden who, of her own free will, was going to lose it from sight and shut herself forever in the shadows of the cloister. The carriage passed by the feudal palace of the Peñaltas, the ancient walls of which, spotted here and there with moss, cast upon the street a mantle of gloom, making still more vivid the blazing light of the sun.

What was Ricardo doing during this time?

Maria did not ask this; she passed by without casting even a furtive look at the Gothic windows; on her lips still hovered the serene, condescending smile. The shadow nevertheless caused in her a slight tremor of chill.

At the church door all her girl friends, including *Martita*, were waiting for her. The temple was overflowing with people; they made way for her to pass. At the high altar the bishop of ———, who had come purposely to give her the veil, stood ready to receive her. He knelt and prayed for a few instants. The confused murmur of the congregation ceased; an intense silence reigned.

The prelate began to speak in a clear and solemn voice: —

“I know, beloved daughter, that you have formed the resolution to shut yourself forever in this holy house, to the end that you may be all your life long the servant of the Lord . . . I know, likewise, that your will is steadfast, and that you have been enabled to resist not only the various seductions of the world, but also those proper pleasures which the goodness of God allows us to enjoy . . . For your life, my daughter, can be in the midst of mortification and penance more broad than in the tumult of pleasure, and while our spirit remains imprisoned in the flesh are the target of severe and constant temptations.”

The venerable bishop spoke with extraordinary deliberation, making long pauses at the end of his sentences, which lent great dignity to his discourse. His voice was sweet and clear, and rang through the silent nave of the church like sweet music. He went on to trace with terrible accuracy the details of the religious life, spreading out before the young woman's eyes all the apparatus of mortification which it involved; the pleasures of the world entirely forgotten, the senses crucified, earthly affections, even the purest, crushed; and this, not for a day, not for a month, not for a year only, but for all days, all months, all years, until the hour of death, always eagerly seeking for pain as others seek for pleasure. But after he had painted the gloomy picture of the mortification, he went on to express eloquently the pure, lively pleasures to be found in it. "To trust one's self to the arms of God, as a child goes to its mother, that he may do with us as he pleases. To find God in the depths of bitterness and grief, to unite one's self to Him . . . To possess Him . . . and to be the beloved child in whom His infinite grandeur can take delight . . . To live eternally united to Him . . . To be His bride! . . . Is not that a sufficient recompense for the petty sorrows that we may experience in a life so brief?"

Began the profession of faith. The bishop asked, reading his questions from a book, if she were ready to leave the life of the world and intercourse with its creatures, to consecrate herself exclusively to the service of God. Maria replied that she had heard the voice of the Lord and hastened at the call. The prelate asked once more if she had meditated well on her resolution, if she had made it from some mundane consideration, wounded by some ephemeral disillusion. Maria replied that she came

of her own free will to give herself up to the Beloved of her soul and rest in Him; all the armies of the earth could not make her retrace her steps, for the Lord had made her steadfast and immovable as Mount Zion.

Over the heads of the faithful appeared a great silver waiter, the same which a few hours before was in one of the convent cells, and on it the habit of the novice of San Bernardo. The prelate blessed it.

Then were heard the sharp, nasal tones of the organ, and the procession took up the line of march: Maria in front, and at her side her godmother and Marta; next came the bishop and behind him the clergy. Some of the people followed and some stayed in the church. Near the door was the entrance to the convent, through which they passed, penetrating into a large, gloomy cloister, illuminated at intervals by a bright sunbeam coming through the swell of the arches. At the end of one of the galleries was an open door, and guarding it, silent, motionless, were seen the white figures of two nuns with wax tapers in their hands. The bride-elect again knelt, and instantly rising she convulsively pressed her sister to her heart. It was the last embrace. When she wished to extricate herself, Martita's arms were so tightly clasped about her neck that it required the intervention of several ladies to accomplish it. She also kissed all her girl friends, who wept bitterly, while she, giving an example of sublime serenity, joyous and smiling, entered the of the Lord escorted by the two nuns.

The doors closed. Though it was the month of A Marta and her friends felt a sudden chill in the clo and hastened to take refuge in the church, where Serapio, accompanied by the organ, was annil Stradella's beautiful prayer.

All waited some time with impatient curiosity. No one paid any attention to the cracked voice of the proprietor of the canning factory; the eyes of the congregation were fixed, glued to the choir of the Bernardas, gazing through the bars at the little door in the rear.

At last she appeared. She came, escorted still by the two nuns. The garb of novice made her look a little older. Yet she was beautiful; very beautiful; for she really was beautiful, that saintly and extraordinary creature. The people devoured her with their eyes, and repeated in a whisper, "She comes smiling, she comes smiling."

Ah, yes, the new bride of Jesus Christ was smiling, in her expectation of the sweet reward for her sacrifice. But the venerable man who, at that same instant, was walking alone through one of the state departments of the Elorza mansion . . . he did not smile! And the young man who, at the same time, was sitting with folded arms, and head sunken for his breast, face to face with a woman's portrait, was he perhaps smiling? . . . No, no! neither did he smile.

The prelate came to the grating, and said to the novice, —

"Thou shalt not call thyself Maria Magdalena, but, Maria Juana de Jesús."

The novice prostrated herself before the abbess, and respectfully kissed the crucifix of her rosary. Then she embraced, one after another, her new companions. While this scene was transpiring, many of the ladies in the congregation shed tears. The bishop said the solemn mass, and finally all the sisterhood, including Maria, took the Communion. The organ shrilled, whistled, and snorted with more energy than ever, spurred, perhaps,

by competition. It seemed as though Don Serapio and the organ had entered into a tremendous contest, a duel to the death, and the obstreperous consequences fell upon the ears of the faithful. But the organ mocked the manufacturer in most audacious fashion. When he reached the highest point of ecstasy, emitting from this throat some complicated *floritura*, or *fermata*, a horrisonant bellowing broke in upon him pitilessly, leaving him lost and inundated for a long time. Don Serapio struck out again with a tender note, sure of the effect . . . Zas! the organ, like a blood-thirsty beast, fell upon it, and tore it in pieces. Thus it wantoned for a long time, until, tired of amusing itself and intoxicated with triumph, it suddenly broke in with all its voices at once, clamoring in the silence of the church with a monstrous insufferable shriek. The manufacturer remained choked in that diabolical roar, and ceased to appear.

Silence reigned for a few moments, but it was disturbed by a peculiarly melancholy tinkling. It was the curtain of the choir being drawn. Nothing more was seen. They began to put out the lights, and the people withdrew in all haste.

Maria's intimate friends went to the reception-room¹ to give her their felicitations.

The reception-room was a square, and rather gloomy apartment, cut in two by a double iron grating. The novice appeared, accompanied by the Mother Superior . . . Still smiling, perhaps? . . . Yes, smiling.

"What examples you have given us of courage and goodness, Maria," said one to her.

The young woman shrugged her shoulders, with a gesture of throwing from her the glory which was heaped upon her.

¹ *locutorio*.

"Don't fail to pray for us!"

"Yes, I will pray for you, dear. We"—she added with a little emphasis—"we are obliged to pray for those who remain in the world."

"If you knew how all the servants wept a moment since."

"Poor people! . . . I love them all so much!"

"Here is Marta, who wants to say good by."

"Come nearer, Marta . . . Are you becoming reconciled yet?"

"What remedy have I, Maria," replied the girl, struggling to repress her sobs.

"No, sister; you must resign yourself gladly, and be thankful to the Lord for the favors which he has heaped upon me . . . You will always be good, will you not? . . . Console papa . . . Don't forget those prayers which I gave you, nor fail to read the books of which I told you . . . Come to hear mass every day . . . Try to be always earnest and humble . . ."

Ah, no! Martita would not try, would not try. As she was born good and humble there is no need of striving for it. In this regard the bride of the Lord may be at rest.

The small room where the two nuns stood near the grating seemed like a prison cell by its ugliness and gloom. Their tunics stood out like two white spots against the black lattice.

The friends took turns in speaking, or all spoke at once to Maria, with a strange mixture of admiration, of pity, of curiosity, and of affection. They asked a thousand impertinent questions and many ridiculous requests about prayers, medals, and other things. A few young fellows who had belonged to the old tertulias at the Elorza man-

sion, had slipped in with the crowd, and were gazing with wide-open eyes of wonder at the new nun, but dared not speak to her. She showed herself serene and lovely, and called them by name with a certain reassuring condescension, giving them messages for their families. The boldest was the ceremonious youth of the banged hair, who stepped up, and reaching the grating, very much stifled, called the novice by her new name, saying, —

“Sister Juana, I want to ask you a favor; please give me as a remembrance a few orange blossoms from the crown which you wear . . .”

“If the mother is willing . . .” murmured Maria, turning her face to the Mother Superior.

She bowed assent, and the gift of orange flowers was liberal and gracefully granted.

At that instant the Sister Luisa, the nun who was to be punished for her vanity, came in and fell upon her knees, but not the slightest trace of a blush passed over her face. The habit of performing such deeds deprived them of all worth.

The conversation wandered off upon festivals, novenas to come, the journey of the vicar who was called to be canon of the cathedral, his successor, and other subjects. Insensibly all were lowering the tone of their voices until there was only a monotonous and melancholy whispering. It seemed like a visit of condolence rather than of congratulation. They continued to extol Maria's courage and virtue. “Ay, Dios mio! to think that she is a prisoner forever and living a life of so much labor . . .”

The Mother Superior looking at the novice, with a sort of half smile not very encouraging, exclaimed, “Poor little one! poor little one!” But she, turning around

with one of those graceful gestures so characteristic, replied, "Rich little one, rich little one,¹ say I, mother!"

Gradually the young men had been getting near the girls, and without respect to the holiness of the place, or heeding the stern crucifixes fastened to the walls, they began to whisper more or less roguish remarks.

"When are you going to follow her example, Fulanita? The truth is, that if all of you did the same, what would become of us? But you would be sure to look lovely in the habit! See here, Amparito! If you should become a nun, I should wish to be vicar!"

"Now I wish you would be a little more serious, Suárez."

"How long should I have to be a priest to become vicar? . . . the worst thing is the grating . . . Can't the vicar get behind the grating?"

"Be silent, man alive! it is a sin to say such things in this place!"

Rosarito and her lover had taken possession of a corner, only from time to time making some insignificant remark roused into the category of the sublime by the inflection of the voice and the trembling of the lips. Only the old women, and a few young girls who had not succeeded in finding mates, still continued talking with the nuns. At last the Mother Superior arose from her chair, and Maria followed her example.

A man, a venerable man, crossed the plaza of Nieva with rapid strides; he followed the winding streets, he

¹ *riquita*.

reached the convent of San Bernardo, he entered the court, mounted the stairway, pushed open the door of the reception-room, forced his way through the people, and laid heavy hands on the grating. He intended to say something solemn, something tremendous. It could be seen by the wrathful expression of his face, by the pallor of his cheeks, by the disorder of his white locks.

But he let his head fall, and only murmured, —

“ My daughter ! my daughter ! ”

And a flood of tears burst from his eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.


THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA'S DREAM.

THE transfer of the young artillery lieutenant, Ricardo de Peñalta, had not yet arrived. He had applied for it a fortnight before the Señorita de Elorza took the veil. A month had already passed since the great ceremony . . . and nothing! The influential personages whom our friend had in Madrid, devoted to his interests, this time took little pains to fulfil his desires.

But why was our hero so anxious to leave Nieva? Be it said in honor of the truth, that when Ricardo asked for the transfer he was exceedingly desirous of turning his back forever upon those places where he had been so happy, and where he was going to be so wretched; but now, after the lapse of a month, the violence of his sorrow had somewhat subsided, and he was beginning to get accustomed to his misfortune. Still he continued to be greatly downcast; the whole town noticed it.

From the day when his betrothed had made him that horrible proposition, which he could not remember without being hot with anger, he understood that he should never be the master of Maria's heart. A secret and implacable voice kept ceaselessly whispering this to him. Thus the letter in which she announced her determination to enter the convent caused him no great surprise; for some time a rumor of this had been current in society. Yet, in spite of his best efforts, he could not help feeling a quick, keen pang, and a melancholy that prostrated him com-

pletely. The more or less well-founded belief that the beloved woman does not return one's affection, is by no means the same thing as to see it confirmed by a material tangible fact. Not any longer did he retain the right to lose his temper and relieve his wrath by calling her perfidious and treacherous, as happens in the majority of cases. As the sincere Christian that he was, it became him to look with patience, even with pleasure (the letter said so distinctly !), upon that pious substitution of holy, sublime affections for those of earth, noble though they were. Maria was blameworthy in no respect,—absolutely in no respect ; her conduct was worthy of all praise, and he saw how the whole city spontaneously and warmly rendered her their tribute. Possibly in this thought the young marquis found the only possible consolation ; for the certain thing was, that the beautiful girl had not left him for any other man, but to follow the hard road that leads to heaven, for which, doubtless, it must require the doing of great violence to self. And in this violence our marquis took a little pride by thinking with delight, and at the same time with pain, on the strength which the new bride of Jesus must have employed, to tear up the roots of such a solid and long-established affection. But amid the beautiful foliage of these more or less consoling thoughts, a sad and cruel doubt often raised its odious head. Though Ricardo employed all expedients to get rid of such an idea, he could not help thinking very frequently that Maria had never professed for him a sincere and vehement love, like his for her ; that she had been his betrothed through a compromise, through the influence of the peculiar circumstances in which both had found themselves in Nieva ; that perhaps she had deceived herself in thinking that she loved him, since if she had



really loved him, the idea of taking part in ridiculous conspiracies would never have entered into her head, still less that of proposing to him odious acts of treason ; that Maria was a girl of much talent and great imagination, admirably fitted to shine in the world, or to undertake some religious or secular enterprise, of no matter how lofty a character, but incapable, perhaps from the very same reason, of delicacy of sentiments, of constancy, of the modest and humble abnegation which ought to characterize good wives and mothers. Finally Ricardo came to the conclusion that his mistress had more head than heart, or else he did not know what he was talking about.

And gradually under the influence of these doubts, which went almost as far as to be certainties, there sprang up in his mind a strong aversion to the amorous memories, which were a drawback to him. When he thought of the Maria of former times, so joyous, so lovely, so buoyant, his heart would melt within him, and the tears would flow ; when his thought went back to the day on which, hidden behind the curtains, he saw her pass by his house unmoved and smiling, without so much as casting a glance at his windows, his heart was filled with a bitterness not free from rancor. And when he saw her in his imagination in the garb of a San Bernardin nun, entirely oblivious of the sweet scenes which had been the enchantment of his life, despising them, perhaps, and looking upon them with horror, as though they had been crimes, our young friend — may God forgive him the sin — began to look with hatred upon the bride of Jesus Christ. These doubts which constantly assaulted him were a genuine cautery for his passion, painful and cruel, like all cauteries, but very salutary in their effects.

He did not for an instant cease to frequent the Elorza

mansion as before. There he found two human beings whom he pitied and who pitied him. Moreover, it was a habit of his to spend a few hours each day between those four walls, and not only a habit, but a debt of gratitude for the affection lavished upon him, and not only a debt, but also — and why should we not say so? — also a pleasure, a great pleasure, since he could not fail to find it so in being with such an accomplished gentleman as Don Mariano, who had showed that he loved him like a son, and with such a good and beautiful girl as Marta, whom he loved like a sister. Grief had still further limited the circle of his affections. In proportion as the recollection of Maria became less pleasant to him, the sweeter did he find the love of that family, and he clung to it as to the last plank in the shipwreck of his hopes. If he let this plank escape him, he would be left alone. Alone! alone! This word brought back to him that terrible night spent in the train, when he returned to Nieva after his mother's death. Cruel fate sounded it in his ears when he least expected it. Finally, while he stayed in Nieva, it did not ring with such a mournfully and disconsolate accent, because all that he saw and touched in his own house spoke to him of his mother's tenderness; and all that he found in the Elorza mansion, recalled Maria's love; but how would it be in the future? . . . What would the desert fields of Castilla say to him, across which the swift locomotive would carry him? What would the indifferent multitude in the streets of Madrid say to him? . . . Therefore Ricardo feared more than he desired the transfer which he had asked for with so much eagerness.

Every day when he reached the Elorza's, Martita asked him, "Has it come yet, Ricardo?"

Sometimes he replied between jest and earnest, —

"Perhaps you are anxious for me to go away, Martita?"

"Oh, no," would be the young girl's reply, with an inflection of voice equal to a poem.

But Ricardo did not have the power of reading it. These love-wrecked men, these men wounded by disenchantment, cannot read other poems than their own.

Marta, after the death of her mother, in whose illness Ricardo had so much aided and consoled her, once more treated him with the same confidence and affection as of old. For some time she had been rather cool toward him. Don Mariano's younger daughter had passed through a terrible crisis, and no one in the house had a suspicion of it. While it lasted she was rather more brusque in her behavior, more restless, more serious and reserved; but at last her calm spirit and her healthy and well-balanced nature came out victorious. Doña Gertrudis's death, which was a more serious and genuine calamity than anything else, had no small effect in calming the disturbances and commotions of her heart. She was once more the same Marta, tranquil, serene, and affectionate as before, always anxious to free obstacles from the path of others, though her own were blocked by an unsurmountable wall. Fortunate are they who in life meet with these blessed beings who found their own happiness in that of others, and who offer the flowers and content themselves with the thorns.

Ricardo spent long hours at the Elorzas'. Whole afternoons, especially, he devoted to Don Mariano and his daughter, going to walk with them when the weather was fair, and staying in the house when it rained. Sometimes, too, he came in the morning, and then Don Mariano would invite him to stay to dinner. While Ricardo

refused and the caballero insisted, Marta did not open her lips, but her anxiety was betrayed in her face, and her eager desire to keep him shone in her supplicating eyes. When, finally, he accepted, the girl's joy was evident, and her solicitude was evident in the way that she took charge of everything, going to and from the kitchen any number of times, preparing the dishes which she knew were most to the young marquis's taste, and keeping the servants alert; the *beefsteak à la inglesa* (for Ricardo had learned in Madrid to eat it rather rare), the cold fish, the boiled rice, the slice of lemon (Ricardo put lemon on almost all his food), the English mustard, the olives, and other things. But where Marta used her five senses was with the coffee. Ricardo was a perfect Arab, a Sybarite in regard to coffee. Thus it was that the girl bestowed a more lively and vigilant care upon the preparation of this liquid than a chemist on the analysis of some precious metal. While she came and went, making all the preparations, the young fellow did not cease to rally her in the same affectionate tone as of old; and this, too, though Marta, if still a little short for her age, was now a real woman, and not among the worst favored, either, as we have already had occasion to remark. She had grown slightly, nevertheless.

"Come, *caponcita*,¹ when did you stop growing?" said Ricardo, detaining her by one of her braids of hair, as she was passing in front of him.

The girl smiled, shrugged her shoulders, and continued on her way.

From the day on which he had been vexed with her, Martita had never asked him about the transfer, but whenever he entered the house, all gave him a keen, anx-

¹ little stopple.

ious look, as though trying to read some tidings in his face. As it did not come, the girl recovered her tranquillity and resumed her work, which she rarely failed to have in her hands. Ricardo likewise said nothing about going away; either he did not remember his petition, or affected not to remember it, or wished not to remember it. Perhaps it was a little of all. The Marquis de Peñalta had passed from disconsolateness to melancholy, and from this he was gradually letting himself drift on toward a happier frame of mind. The house where Marta sewed began to inspire jocund ideas of sweet ease and happiness.

One morning, Ricardo, as though it was the most natural thing in the world, as though the tidings did not tear any one's heart, as though it were some mere trifle of little consequence at issue, came into the Elorzas', and said,—

“Yesterday evening at last my transfer to Valencia came!”

Blind! blind! dost thou not see that girl's pallor? Dost thou not notice the painful trembling that runs over her body? Look out! she is going to fall! Run, run to her assistance!

Nothing, the young marquis perceived nothing! He, too, was a little pale. The indifferent tone in which he made the announcement was pure comedy, for I know on good authority that he walked up and down his room the night before, till he was tired out, and that the rays of the morning found him still unable to close his eyes.

Don Mariano made a gesture of disappointment, exclaiming,—

“There, my son, there! . . . I feel that we are going to lose you! . . . However, if it is your pleasure . . .”

Ricardo preserved a gloomy silence. Gladly would he

have exclaimed, "How can it be my pleasure? My pleasure would be to ask for a discharge at this very moment, and stay here forever and live calmly near you! Near you, the people whom I love most in this world!" But he had the weakness to hold his tongue, and such weaknesses as these generally cost very dear in life.

"And when do you expect to go?" pursued the caballero.

"To-morrow. I must stop in Madrid a few days to attend to some business. I shall reach Valencia the tenth of next month."

"Are you going to some regiment?"

"To the First Cavalry."

"Ah!"

And there was silence. Sadness ruled them all, choking conversation, which usually was very animated, even though it touched upon the details of domestic affairs. Don Mariano renewed it in a sad and distracted tone.

"Have you ever been in Valencia?"

"Yes, sir; I spent a month there a few years ago."

"It is very pretty, isn't it?"

"Yes; very pretty."

"Many oranges, eh?"

"A great many."

"I think it is a very gay city."

"No, not gay; it seemed to me very melancholy."

"Then, my dear fellow, I should think . . ."

But they relapsed into silence. Their hearts were oppressed, and the indifferent tone of the words was not sufficient to hide it. Marta had not once spoken during all the time, and, as she sat in a low chair next the window, paid close attention to her crochet work. Ricardo was lounging on the sofa near Don Mariano. A thou-

sand melancholy thoughts sifted through the minds of all three, and that cheerful room, bright in the pure, brilliant morning light, was nevertheless filled with sadness and silence. When the Señor de Elorza spoke to Ricardo again, his emotion shone through his slightly hoarse and tremulous voice.

"And what arrangements have you made about your house? . . . Are you going to dismiss the servants?"

"All except Pepe, the gardener, and César, the inside man."

"Have you packed yet?"

"No; I shall have time this afternoon and to-morrow morning."

"And your calls?"

"Really, Don Mariano, the only people with whom I am intimate are you here . . . Three or four other calls, and I am done . . . I shall send cards to the rest . . . What I am most sorry about is, to leave the improvements in my garden unfinished, and the two pavilions in the corners just begun . . ."

"Don't be troubled about that, I will attend to it . . . I will attend to it . . . I will attend to it . . ."

He could say no more. Emotion choked him. Those pavilions had been Maria's idea before the engagement was broken, and this recollection brought in its train many others, all painful, in which his wife, his daughter, and Ricardo were mingled, bringing before his eyes the terrible misfortunes which he had recently suffered. He hastily arose and left the room.

Ricardo, likewise moved and overwhelmed by great dejection, remained with bent head, and silent. Marta kept on busily with her task, as though she felt no interest in what was going on. She did not once lift her head

during the conversation, nor even when her father left the room. Ricardo looked at her fixedly a long time. The girl's impassive attitude began to mortify him. He had presumptuously imagined that it would affect Martita very deeply to hear the announcement of his departure, for she had always given evidence of being fond of him. He had blind confidence in the goodness of her heart and the strength of her affections; but when he saw her so serene moving the ivory needle between her slender rosy fingers without asking him anything about it, without urging him to postpone his journey for a few days, without speaking a word, he felt a new and painful disenchantment. And he allowed himself, by the weight of his gloomy thoughts to be drawn away into a desperate, pessimistic philosophy

"Then, sir," he said to himself tearfully, "you must accept the world and humanity as they are . . . This girl whom I believed to be so tender-hearted . . . What is to be done about it? . . . In woman exists only one true affection . . . Can it possibly be that this child is in love with some one?"

Ricardo had no reason to be indignant at such thought. But it is certain that he was indignant, and not a little. He tried to drive it away as an absurdity and succeeded only in convincing himself that, not only it would not be an absurdity, but would not even be strange. But as he was downcast, indignation very soon gave way to sadness; deep, painful sadness.

"Aren't you sorry that I am going away?" he asked with a sort of melancholy smile creeping over his face.

"Not if it is your pleasure to go . . ." replied the girl, not lifting her head.

Confound the pleasure! Ricardo had no longer any desire to go away; he was furious with himself for having

asked to be sent. Gladly would he give everything to exchange . . . But he did not say a word of what he thought.

His sadness and depression kept increasing. He felt a cruel desire to weep. He dared not say a word to Marta, lest she should notice his emotion. Besides, what reason had he to speak to her? . . . Such an unfeeling child!

He found himself in one of those moments of dejection in which everything appears clad in black, and he took a certain bitter delight in it; moment, in which one (if the expression be permissible) wallows voluptuously in sadness, endeavoring to add to it by unhappy recollections and expectations. He dropped his head on the pillow of the sofa, and shut his eyes, as though he were meditating. Our hero had been meditating deeply, deeply, for many hours. His nerves had been on the strain for a long time, and he began to feel the attack of a languor akin to faintness. He lifted his head a little, to prove to himself that he still had the power of motion, and he looked once more at Martita, who was still in the same position; but very soon he let it fall again. It seemed to him as if he were seized against his will, and kept lying there, without the possibility of moving a finger. He still had his eyes open, but they were as heavy as if the lids had been made of lead. At last he closed them, and fell asleep. That is, we cannot say that he slept, or only napped. It is certain, however, that the Marqués de Peñalta, thus stretched out, with eyes closed, seemed to be asleep, and his face looked so pale, there were such dark rings under his eyes, and his whole appearance was so lifeless that it inspired alarm.

In the space of a few moments one can dream of many

and very different things. All have experienced this phenomenon. Ricardo had not as yet entirely lost the idea of reality, when he found himself in a room like the one in which he really was. However, there was this difference, that in the new one the window had very thick iron gratings, like lattices, and one of the walls was likewise grated, through which there could be seen in the background, gilded altars, images of saints, lamps hung from the ceiling; in fact, a real church. Looking attentively from the sofa, he perceived that a great throng was pouring into the church, causing a low, but disagreeable noise, until they filled it entirely, and there was no more room. Then he began to hear the tones of an organ playing the waltzes of the Queen of Scotland, which made him suspect that the organist was Fray Saturnino, the capellane of San Felipe. Then, rising above the heads of the people, he saw the gilded points of a mitre. The organ ceased, and he heard the nasal voice of a preacher delivering a long sermon, although he could not understand a word of what he said. When the sermon was over, he heard a sweet song which made him tremble with delight; it was Maria's sweet voice, singing with more sweetness than ever, the aria from *Traviata*: "Gran Dio morir si giovane." When this was finished, prolonged applause rang through the church. Then all the people crowded up to the great altar, leaving the spaces near the grating free. Something was going on there, for he clearly heard some voices saying, —

"Now he gives her the benediction . . . now . . . now."

And at the same instant Don Maximo appeared in the door of the room, and said, —

"What are you doing, lying down here? Didn't you know that Maria is being married?"

"Whom is she marrying?"

"Jesus Christ! Come and see the ceremony!"

He desired to arise, but could not. Then the physician said, —

"Well, since you cannot move, I will go into the church, to see if I can persuade the people to stand aside a little so that you may see from here."

And in fact, he soon perceived that the congregation was making a sufficiently wide passage from the grating, so that he could see afar away, over the steps of the great altar, Maria's proud figure in bridal array. At her side stood another little human figure holding her by the hand. The bishop was giving them his blessing. It was no more Jesus Christ than it was a pumpkin! The person whom Maria was marrying was neither more nor less than Manolito Lopez, that most impertinent and uncongenial of urchins! He was like one who saw a vision! Could it be possible that a girl so beautiful and wise, would unite herself to this cub and leave him, who in every respect was a man abandoned to despair? The truth is, he had reason for serious and painful reflections. But just as he was getting deeper and deeper involved in them, behold the same Maria enters the room in the garb of a San Bernardo nun, and coming directly to him said, sweetly smiling, —

"Art thou sad because I marry?"

"Why should I not be?"

"Fool," says the young woman, coming still closer, "though I am wedded to Jesus Christ, yet I love thee the same as before."

Then Ricardo began to sigh and groan.

"No, Maria, you do not love me; you love Manolito Lopez."

"Come, Ricardo mio, don't talk nonsense. How could I love this urchin?"

"Have you not just married him?"

"You must be dreaming; don't say any more absurd things . . . Wake up, man — wake up . . . or wait a little, I am going to wake you. But see in what a sweet way!"

And in fact, the beautiful nun came even closer still, and took his face between her dainty hands with an affectionate gesture. Then she brought her own close to his slowly, and gave him a warm and prolonged kiss on the brow.

Oh! wonderful chance! Ricardo noticed with amazement, that just as she gave him the caress, Maria's face had suddenly changed into Marta's. Yes; it was her bright black eyes; her fresh rosy cheeks; her dark hair falling in ringlets around her brow. But her face seemed so sad and mournful that he could not do less than cry, —

"Marta, Marta! what ails thee?"

And the very cry that he made awoke him.

Marta still sat in the low chair beside the window, apparently absorbed in her work. And nevertheless, the young man, though awake, was sure that he had cried out. All that had passed was a dream; but neither the cry nor the warm, moist lips which he felt imprinted on his brow were imaginary; though he were killed, he could not be convinced of it.

What was it? What had passed?

He remained some instants looking at Martita, while he slowly collected his ideas. At last he decided to speak to her. The girl lifted her face which was flushed and disturbed.

"Did I not just cry out?"

Martita grew still more flushed and disturbed, and scarcely could she answer in trembling voice, —

"No . . . I heard nothing."

Ricardo looked at her steadily and with surprise: "Why was that girl blushing so?"

"I was asleep, but I would take my oath that I cried out . . . and I would also take my oath — such a strange thing! — that you gave me a kiss."

Marta's color, when she heard these words, suddenly changed from rosy to pale, betraying a profound consternation. Her tremulous hands could not hold her crochet work, and dropped it in her lap. At the same time her eyes rested on Ricardo with such an expression of fear, of tenderness, of supplication, of dismay, that he felt a strong shock, like that caused by an electric discharge.

It was the same look — the same that he had just seen in his dream.

He felt himself inundated by a great light, a divine light. At that supreme moment he saw everything, he comprehended all. The mist that blinded his eyes faded away, and he saw himself face to face with the scene in the garden, when Marta seemed so offended because he kissed her hands . . . and he saw and comprehended. The strange dismay following that scene he likewise saw and comprehended. Then he went back in imagination to the beach on the island. The sun pouring floods of light over the sand; the blue and white waves girdling a peninsula where two young people had been long sitting; the sob which broke the silence of the tunnel; then a girl falling into the water, and a young man plunging in after her and saving her. "Thanks, Señor Marqués, it is not so bad down below there." This also he saw, he comprehended. Then a sudden and extraordinary estrangement: a pair of eyes that did not look at him, two lips that did not speak to him, a pair of hands that did not touch him.

Ah, yes ; he saw all ; he understood all.

He sprang up hastily from the sofa, and bringing his face close to Marta's, said to her in sweet, affectionate tones, but with innocent petulance, —

“Don't deny it, Martita ; you just gave me a kiss !”

The girl raised her hands to her face, and broke into a passion of tears. A thousand emotions of fear, of penitence, of affection, of doubt, of joy, of anxiety, instantly crossed the heart of the young marquis who bent his knee before her, exclaiming in accents of emotion, —

“Marta, for God's sake, forgive my stupidity . . . I am a fool ! . . . I just dreamed such sad things, and they suddenly all ended so well ! . . . I could not resign myself to let happiness escape so . . . an absurd idea came into my head, inspired by the very idea of seeing it realized . . . But no . . . no ! I cannot be happy on earth . . . I was born to be unfortunate . . . Luckily I shall die early, like my father . . . and like my mother . . . Forgive me that momentary folly, and don't weep . . . Do you want to know what I was dreaming ? . . . I am going to tell you, because perhaps it will be the last time that you will see me . . . I dreamed . . . I dreamed, Marta, that you loved me.”

The girl opened her hands a little, and ejaculated with a certain wrathful, but adorable intonation these words, which were immediately cut short by sobs, —

“You dreamed the truth, ingrato !”

The Marqués de Peñalta, beside himself, entirely carried away by his emotions, his heart ready to burst, pressed her in his arms without being able to speak a word. At last, very softly, very softly, with the sublime incoherence of the heart, like a murmur of celestial harmony, he whispered into the ears of his friend the hymn of love. Dios

mio! how sweet sounded that hymn in Marta's ears! I do not intend to repeat it: no; the pen cannot reproduce that mysterious language which comes directly from the heart, scarcely touching the lips, — accents escaping from heaven and hastening to take refuge in the breast of virgins, — for the earth does not understand them, notes perhaps lost from the song with which the angels celebrate their immortal bliss.

Marta listened. Tremulous, confused, she hid her head in her lover's breast, shedding a flood of tears. Ricardo pressed her closer and closer to his heart without wearying of repeating the same phrase, — the most beautiful phrase that God ever suggested to man. Once the girl raised her head to ask in low and tremulous voice, —

“You will not go now, will you?”

Little desire had Ricardo at that moment to go away! Not for all that was precious in earth and in heaven would he go away. His spirit did not dare to pass by even the window-panes, fearful lest it should lose the bliss in which it was bathed. Nevertheless, he had sufficient self-control to tear himself away a moment and rush to the door, crying, —

“Don Mariano! Don Mariano!”

The Señor de Elorza, alarmed, nervous as he had been for some time, came in haste, fearing some new misfortune. Ricardo's face, wherein shone the deep emotion which overmastered him, was not calculated to calm any one. What was the matter? Why did they call him?

“Don Mariano,” said the young man, and his voice stuck in his throat . . . “I have the honor of asking the hand of your daughter Marta.”

That was a thunder-stroke; but what the devil! Had he gone crazy? . . . What did it mean, sir? We shall

see, we shall see! Nothing; Don Mariano could say nothing, could do nothing, could think of nothing, for before he could say, do, or think of anything, his daughter's arms were around his neck, and she was weeping as though her heart would break . . . What was left for the noble caballero? To weep likewise. Why, this was exactly what he did, pressing his beloved child with one arm, and squeezing with his other hand the Marqués of Peñalta's.

"You will not abandon me, will you, my children?" entreated the venerable man, lifting his noble, manly face bathed in tears.

Ricardo pressed his hand more warmly. Marta clung to his neck more fondly.

There were a few moments of silence, during which all the angels of heaven swept through the room, which was bathed in the morning sun, and gazed with radiant eyes of joy upon that interesting group. But now Martita lifts her face a little from her father's breast, and, smiling through her tears, asks her lover coyly: "Will you dine with us to-day, Ricardo?"

"Yes, preciosa mia," replied the young marquis, falling on his knees, and kissing the girl's hands again and again; "I will to-day, and to-morrow, and every day forever!"

Marta hid her face again on the paternal breast! Her heart was so full of joy! The three shed tears in silence; but what sweet tears!

O eternal God, who dwellest in the hearts of the good! are they perhaps less pleasing to Thee than the mystic colloquies of the Convent of San Bernardo?

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